

PICTURE HOUSE

MAGAZINE OF THE CINEMA THEATRE ASSOCIATION



NO 22 SUMMER 1997 £3.50



TO PROMOTE SERIOUS
INTEREST IN ALL
ASPECTS OF CINEMA
BUILDINGS

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PICTURE HOUSE

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ABOUT THE CINEMA THEATRE ASSOCIATION

THE CINEMA THEATRE ASSOCIATION was started in 1967 by journalist Eric George, who wished to see more attention paid to the magnificent movie palaces of the Twenties and Thirties which were then starting to disappear from our towns and cities. Since then, the Association has widened its horizons to encompass the study of all cinema buildings, however humble, as well as live theatres, music halls and those entertainment buildings now in use as bingo halls or for other purposes.

All aspects of cinemas and theatres are studied, including architecture, decoration, film projection and stage facilities. Consideration is given to their study in terms of the history of entertainment, social history, industrial archaeology and architectural history. Wherever possible, the Association campaigns for the preservation and continued use of cinemas and theatres for their original purpose.

The Association organises visits to cinemas and theatres of interest, when members are able to study the buildings and their technical facilities at their leisure. Lectures and film shows are held from time to time.

The Association issues two publications: **Picture House** and the **CTA Bulletin** which is sent to members every two months and consists of news of cinemas nationwide as well as information on forthcoming events.

The Association has an archive of material on the subject which may be consulted by members by appointment with the archivist.

Full membership - The annual subscription is £12.00 (£15.00 overseas) for which members receive all the above publications and are entitled to attend the Association's events.

Associate membership for a second person living at the same address costs £5.00 (same price for overseas) which entitles them to attend events only.

The address of the Membership Secretary is listed on the left

(Front cover) 'Night architecture': The Harbour Lights spills light into Southampton's Ocean Village at night. The blue neon 'CINEMA' sign had not been mounted on the stair tower when this picture was taken.



Pictures at the Palace

By GRAEME CRUICKSHANK

WHILST THE rest of the country celebrated "100 Years of Cinema" in 1996, the centenary of the arrival of film at the Palace Theatre, Cambridge Circus, London, was marked on 18 March 1997.

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The Palace, built as an opera house by Richard D'Oyly Carte, opened as such in January 1891, but after the failure of this enterprise became a variety theatre at the end of 1892.

The new company was headed by Sir Augustus Harris as Managing Director and Count Max Hollender as Chairman. Harris was well known for his highly popular pantomimes at Drury Lane and his Italian opera seasons at Covent Garden. However, he proved less than successful in the management of a variety theatre and, in 1893, the company was re-formed. Hollender added the duties of Managing Director to his Chairmanship and Charles Morton was brought in as Manager.

Morton, by then aged 74, had long experience of this side of the business. A pioneer of music hall and variety, he was popularly known as "the father of the halls". He soon brought the Palace a reputation as providing the very best in entertainment.

"MOVING PICTURES" INVADE VARIETY¹

The managers of the variety houses in London were always on the lookout for new ideas and although the three most prominent, the Empire and the Alhambra, both in Leicester Square and the Palace, dominating

Cambridge Circus, catered for somewhat different audiences, they were very much in competition.

When the Lumière brothers gave a display of their Cinématographe to the first paying audience for "cinema" in the U.K., at the Marlborough Hall (Regent Polytechnic) on 21 February 1896, the Empire was first off the mark. The Lumière Cinématographe had a trial public showing during a matinee at the Empire on Saturday 7 March and was included in the regular bill from the following Monday.

R. W. Paul's Theatrograph (of somewhat inferior quality to the Lumières' offering) was demonstrated on Saturday morning, 21 March, at the Palace but was "not regarded with sufficient favour to justify the management in securing it."² It seems that Charles Morton and his directors, having lost the race to be first, were content to wait for the best.

On the following day, Sunday 22 March, R. W. Paul gave a Private View of his Theatrograph at the Alhambra, and it went into the regular bill there on 25 March.

In September 1896, the Mutoscope and Biograph Company gave their first public screening of the American Biograph in Pittsburgh.³ One of the partners, E. B. Koopman, was despatched to England to negotiate with Charles Morton. With 68mm film, faster speed and enormous screen the American Biograph was far superior to anything else being seen in the country. Morton secured the sole rights for London (much to the chagrin of Koopman's partners as time went on) and agreed a flat fee of £200 per week (the Empire was paying £120 for the Cinématographe and the Alhambra £60 for the Theatrograph). A Preview Matinee was given on Thursday 18 March and the American Biograph became a popular feature on the Palace bill until the end of 1902. A subsidiary company, the British Mutoscope and Biograph Co., was formed, of which Charles Morton became a shareholder. On the arrival of the American

Biograph the Palace Theatre's *Tableaux Vivants*, which had been a big success there for nearly four years, were immediately dropped.

At the start, all the films shown were of American origin. A review of the Preview Matinee in *The Era* (20 March 1897) includes mention of Joseph Jefferson in a scene from his great stage success, *Rip Van Winkle*, two different express trains travelling at speed, views of Niagara Falls, a black baby being given a bath, the New York Fire Department in action and Sandow's muscular exhibition, amongst many other items. The first British film shown at the Palace seems to have been of the Derby in June 1897. After a while, the individual items were listed in the theatre's programmes. For example, that for 11 April lists sixteen items shown in 21 minutes. The films were accompanied by the full Palace Theatre Orchestra with music arranged and sometimes specially composed by the Musical Director, Alfred Plumptre (later succeeded by the redoubtable Herman Finck). It would appear from a contemporary press report that the Palace was the first to display stills from the films outside the theatre.

A report in *The Music Hall* in 1896 (April 10), had announced that "Mr. Dando, manager of the stage at the Palace has resigned his position ... and intends to open a 'Phantom Theatre' in which he will show a Cinematographe with coloured pictures and a phonograph working together." Walter Dando had installed the stage machinery at the Palace (then the Royal English Opera) for D'Oyly Carte and remained there when the theatre changed hands. He had long had an interest in photography but his plans for a 'Phantom Theatre' do not seem to have reached fruition. By 1899 he was working with the British Mutoscope and Biograph Co. and is credited with filming scenes from Beerbohm Tree's *King John* with W. K. L. Dickson. These were premiered at the Palace on 20 September, the same night that the stage production opened at Her Majesty's Theatre.

The Boer War was closely followed on the Biograph screen at the Palace. On 21 April 1900, the *Pall Mall Gazette* announced that "the Biograph has relieved Ladysmith". When this news was received, the whole of London went mad and the screen was soon illuminated with images of jubilant demonstrations outside the Palace Theatre itself.

During June and July 1902, George Ridgwell, a baritone vocalist, had his own spot on the Palace bill, but he also engaged to sing "descriptive songs" accompanying short films including *Tomorrow Will be Friday*, *Simon the Cellarer* and, during the period of King Edward VII's Coronation, *Here's a Health unto His Majesty*. These films were directed by Hugh Moss, who had been Stage Manager for Sullivan's opera *Ivanhoe* which had opened the theatre, as the Royal English Opera, in 1891. Actors in them included J. A. Cave, who had been in the opening programme of the Palace Theatre of Varieties, and a young Nellie Wallace.

At the end of 1902 the Biograph contract was terminated and the Warwick Trading Company's Bioscope, credited as invented by Charles Urban, moved into the Palace.

On the death of Charles Morton (18 October 1904), his assistant, Alfred Butt, became Manager of the Palace at the age of 26. Butt joined the board as Managing Director in 1906, later becoming Chairman as well.



(Previous page) *The Palace Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, in 1896. (This and other original material in the Palace Theatre Archive used by courtesy of the Archivist). (Above) Frame for an advertising film for the American Biograph at the Palace, c.1896. This was a standard slapstick comedy routine, probably by a known act, as yet unidentified. (Courtesy of the Nederlands Film Museum).*

The Warwick Trading Co.'s Bioscope was replaced, in August 1908, by Charles Urban's own Urbanora Bioscope which was joined on the bill by Kinemacolour on 26 February 1909. This system for producing colour images was developed by Urban with the help of George Albert Smith, working on the process, and Henry W. Joy, who perfected the equipment. In this system the film itself was not coloured at all. By exposing alternate frames of the film through red and green filters and then projecting them through similar filters onto the screen, the human eye was given an impression of full colour. This process was effected at twice the normal speed of the time, increasing wear and tear on the film. The Palace Theatre had exclusive exhibition rights of Kinemacolour within a one mile radius of Cambridge Circus until 1910.

The Urbanora Bioscope covered such events as the disastrous Paris floods of 1910 and the first of two General Elections that year, whilst Kinemacolour featured the funeral processions of King Edward VII. In August Charles Urban's contract terminated and the Palace Bioscope took over.

In December 1910, the second General Election took place and the Liberal government was re-elected (with a majority of one!). Winston Churchill remained as Home Secretary. The Palace Bioscope was soon showing "The Desperate Fight with Anarchists in the East End" (now generally referred to as "The Siege of Sidney Street"). Churchill personally attended the event and was much criticised for doing so. He was accompanied by Eddie Marsh who later wrote: "I make the most gratifying appearance as almost the central figure in 'Mr. Churchill directing operations' at the Palace [Theatre] which is nightly received with unanimous boos and shouts of 'shoot him' from the gallery – why are London's music-hall audiences so bigotedly Tory?"⁴

In 1911 a projection box was built outside the auditorium taking some space from the Dress Circle Bar. This is still intact today, although in other use. In earlier years projectors had been placed in an enclosed area of the Dress Circle itself. Film projection has been from various levels at different times. Evidence of this is still visible. The final projection room took up half the area of the original Upper Circle Bar and is now used as a store room.

In 1913 Cherry Kearton, the David Attenborough of his day, was touring the country, lecturing with his film *Nature's Zoo*, billed as "A World Hunt after Dangerous Animals". He gave a long and successful season of matinees at the Palace, but was not part of the evening bill.

In January 1914, three public matinees were given of *The British Army Film*. The programme stated that "this film shows every phase of the British Army today" – whether to promote the Army as a career, or to reassure the British public worried by the political situation in Europe, is not clear. A preview was shown on 19 January with Lord Roberts in the box and attended by soldiers who had taken part in the film. The following week the Palace programme billed, as the first item on the Bioscope, "The Visit of the Troops to the Palace Theatre ... to view the British Army Film". Sadly, all those present would have been the first to go when war was declared later in the year.

In March 1914, the Palace ceased to be a variety



Troops, who had taken part, attending a Preview Matinee of the British Army Film at the Palace, January 19, 1914. (The Graphic, January 24, 1914).

theatre and presented revues, but for a while these were usually preceded by a short variety bill and the evening would conclude with a Bioscope screening.

In 1918, after the American stage musical *Very Good Eddie* had flopped, Alfred Butt presented D. W. Griffith's feature film *Hearts of the World* twice daily for a two month season.

THE GOLDEN ERA: THE TWENTIES AND THIRTIES

A few more stage productions followed until, in 1921, Sir Alfred Butt (as he by then had become) left the Palace and went to Drury Lane. A new company, The Palace Theatre (1921) Ltd., was formed by Charles B. Cochran with Sol Levy, a man with considerable cinema interests, as joint Managing Director⁵. A clause in the Company's prospectus declared the avowed intention "to run the theatre as a high-class Cinematograph House, in which a combination of Cinematograph plays and stage plays can be presented".

In an extensive interview, reported in the *Daily Express* (12 November 1920), Sol Levy said "There will be no elaborate re-construction work and we are quite prepared to shut off a considerable number of seats in order that there may be no question of anyone not having an excellent view. The film will be projected from the back of the screen, the orchestra will be in a well beneath the

**THE
PALACE THEATRE**
(By arrangement with CHARLES B. COCHRAN).
General Manager - - - - - VIVIAN VAN DAMM
MARCUS LOEW presents



THE REX INGRAM PRODUCTION OF
THE
4 HORSEMEN
OF THE
APOCALYPSE

Twice Daily
2.45 & 8.30 p.m.

Sundays
at 7.45 p.m.

6^D.

stage, and the front seats will not be nearer than thirty feet from the screen."

The Greater London Record Office has a plan, submitted at about this time, for alterations with a brick wall, to enclose a rewinding room, across the back part of the stage. From present architectural evidence it would appear that this was never built.

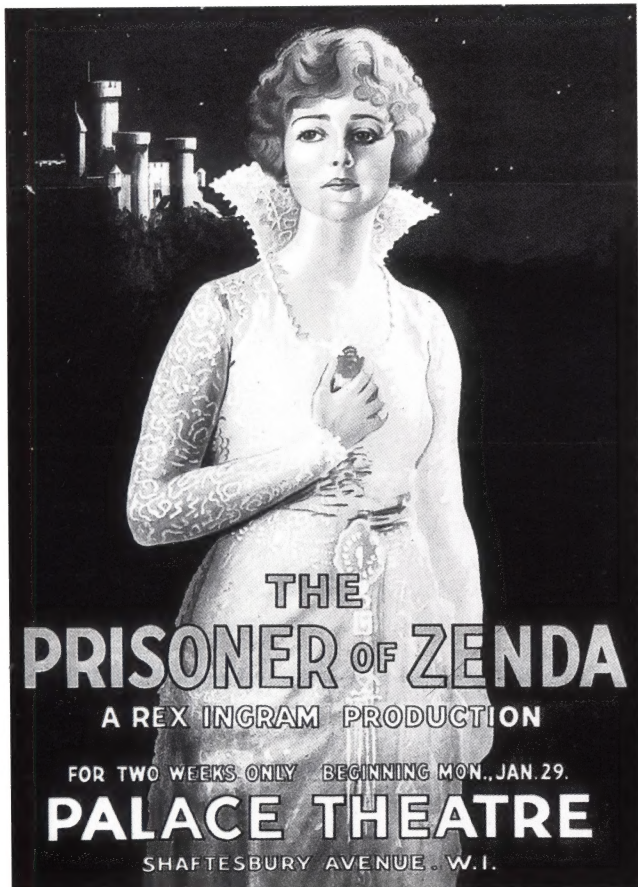
Sol Levy continued, "There will be no attempt whatever to diminish in any way the high standard of comfort, even luxury, which the Palace has always maintained ... the programmes will be booked from week to week, not in advance ... we intend to interfere with the traditions of the Palace as little as possible. For instance there will be three separate 'houses' at 2.30, 6 and 8.45pm respectively, and not a continuous performance, so that the practice of booking seats for particular performances may be continued. Then we intend to establish what is absolutely an innovation in film exhibition - a kind of entr'acte. We will choose films which, at some point or other, offer a suitable time break ... the screen will be removed and we will stage an act ... which will have a direct bearing on the film story, but will amplify it. There may be instances in which we will be able to secure the people who actually appear in the film." Levy expressed himself particularly anxious to feature suitable British films at the Palace.

Early in 1921, a screen version of Edward Sheldon's play *Romance* was shown. This starred Doris Keane, who had first appeared for a long run at the Duke of York's Theatre in 1915, followed by long tours and appearances at other London theatres in the stage production. The film was preceded by an orchestral overture and a staged prologue, *Lovers of the Ages*, featuring such characters as Anthony and Cleopatra, Tristan and Iseult, etc. None of the actors were in the film. The programme lists twenty-eight musical items with which the orchestra accompanied the film. The performance concluded with a couple of variety acts, *Pathé Pictorial*, the *Palace Movie News* and *Pathé Gazette*, not forgetting, of course the National Anthem. According to a contemporary report the *Palace Movie News* was updated daily.⁶ Performances were given twice daily at 2.30 and 8.15pm. On Sundays a "continuous performance" of the "full picture programme" was given between 6.00 and 10.30pm - the live stage elements being omitted, necessarily, due to licensing restrictions.

From May to July an Italian film, *The Dawn of the World*, was shown. This was also preceded by an orchestral overture and with the appearance, on stage, of Mrs Patrick Campbell in a specially written Prologue by Louis N. Parker. She appeared again after the interval. This time twenty-four musical items are listed as accompaniment and there were three performances daily, two on Sundays.

The enterprise was not a successful one and Sol Levy soon left Cochran in sole control of the theatre. The pierrot type entertainment *The Co-Optimists* transferred from the nearby Royalty Theatre, in Dean Street, and ran for nearly a year.

However, film returned in August 1922 when the theatre was sub-let for cinema use to American cinema magnate Marcus Loew who employed Vivian Van Damm (later to achieve fame at the Windmill Theatre) as his



**THE
PRISONER OF ZENDA**
A REX INGRAM PRODUCTION
FOR TWO WEEKS ONLY BEGINNING MON., JAN. 29.
PALACE THEATRE
SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, W.I.

In January 1937, Publicity Films Ltd. gave "A Film Entertainment for the Advertising Men" at the Palace.



THE GOOD EARTH

Metro-
Goldwyn-
Mayer

PALACE THEATRE

SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, W.I. Telephone GERrard 6834-5
Proprietors - LONDON PALACE (1921) LTD. Managing Director - CHARLES B. COCHRAN

Paul
MUNI

Luise
RAINER

“THE
GOOD EARTH”

Directed by Sidney Franklin. Adapted for the screen by Owen & Donald Davis.



Palace
THEATRE
SHAFTESBURY AVE.

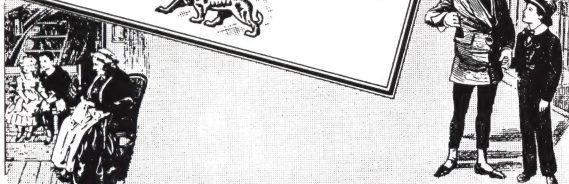
METRO · GOLDWYN · MAYER
PROUDLY PRESENT

Charles Dickens' GREATEST STORY

DAVID
Copperfield

With a notable cast of 65

6^D



PALACE THEATRE
SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, W.1
Managing Director :: :: CHARLES B. COCHRAN

24 PAGES THE MAGAZINE PROGRAMME 24 PAGES




Dinner at 8

6^D



PALACE THEATRE
SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, W.1
Managing Director :: :: CHARLES B. COCHRAN

24 PAGES THE MAGAZINE PROGRAMME 24 PAGES



GRAND HOTEL

6^D

BOOK NOW
for DAVID O. SELZNICK'S Technicolor production
of MARGARET MITCHELL'S
"GONE WITH THE WIND"

The film which is so big that it needs
3 West End theatres to accommodate it!

Starting simultaneously with
3 GALA PREMIÈRES
on Thursday, April 18th, at 7.30 p.m.

EMPIRE	RITZ	PALACE
Leicester Square	Next to Empire	Shaftesbury Avenue
Prices: 4/6 and 8/6	Prices: 4/6, 6/- and 8/6	Prices: 3/6, 4/6, 6/-, 8/6, 10/6
Subsequently: Continuous performance daily 10 a.m. to 11.30 p.m. Sundays at 6.30 p.m. Matinee Prices: (until 5.0 p.m.; Sats. until 12.0 noon) 3/6 and 6/- Evening Prices: 4/6 and 8/6	Subsequently: 2 shows daily beginning at 2.0 and 7.30 p.m. Sundays at 6.30 p.m. Prices as above	Subsequently: 2 shows daily beginning at 2.15 and 7.30 p.m. Sundays at 6.30 p.m. Prices as above
All seats bookable	All seats bookable	All seats bookable

Book your seats now at EMPIRE (Gerr. 1234),
PALACE (Gerr. 6834), RITZ (Gerr. 1234),
or any Ticket-selling Agency.

N.B. "Gone with the Wind" runs for 3 hours 40 minutes; and will begin promptly at the advertised times.

This was a special matinee showing of eleven commercials, for products by Cadbury, Beecham, Dunlop, Ford and others, many featuring well known performers, including Leslie Henson, Nelson Keys and Clapham & Dwyer. This exercise was repeated in 1938 and 1939 but was no doubt halted as an annual event by World War II.

In 1938, Charles B. Cochran presented a six week season of *Flashbacks* with the help of the British Film Institute and others. This was a compilation demonstrating "The evolution of the movies, 1838-1938", commencing with the magic lantern, through to the "all talking, all colour movies". Items shown included some of the American Biograph pictures originally seen at the Palace in the 1890s.

AND AFTER

In 1940, war-time London saw the European Premiere of the blockbuster *Gone With the Wind*, given at three cinemas, the Empire and the Ritz in Leicester Square and the Palace Theatre, on the same night, 18 April. It continued at the Palace for seven weeks.

After the war, Emile Littler took control of the theatre, at first in partnership with Tom Arnold. Following a stage flop in 1947, Oliver's film *Henry V* was given a three week showing.

PALACE THEATRE
SHAFTESBURY AVENUE LONDON, W.1



“GONE WITH THE WIND”

A recent finding of the theatre manager's diaries of 1947 to 1957 records frequent film trade and press shows, given in the afternoons during runs of various stage shows. These films included *The Third Man*, *Bonnie Prince Charlie*, *Spring in Park Lane*, *The Wooden Horse* and many others. During this period there were also seasons of Greek films on Sundays.

In the mid Fifties, Peter Daubeney was using the Palace theatre quite frequently for short runs of stage productions by various foreign drama, opera and dance companies. During enforced gaps in his schedules, Littler reverted to cinema with seasons of Greta Garbo in 1956 and French and Soviet films, both in 1957.

Around 1960, Bernard Delfont, through EMI, gained a 50% interest in the theatre, which continued to be managed by Emile Littler. After seasons of Indian films on Sundays in the Seventies the projectors were finally removed from the Palace in 1980.

In 1983 the theatre was sold to Andrew Lloyd Webber and it is now managed by his Really Useful Group. By this time the fabric of the building was suffering from years of neglect and an extensive restoration programme was undertaken, the exterior refurbishment being completed in 1989. In due course the interior will be returned to its former glory. In the meantime the stage musical *Les Misérables* enjoys immense success and is now in its 12th year. It seems unlikely that the silver screen will ever be illuminated again at the Palace, but who knows?

CHECKLIST OF KNOWN FEATURE FILMS AT THE PALACE THEATRE

DATES	TITLE	WEEKS
1918		
25 Jun./7 Sep	Hearts of the World	9½
1921		
?	Pollyanna	
?	Romance	
23 May	The Mark of Zorro	
May/5 Jul.	Dawn of the World	
1922		
22 Aug./17 Jan	The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse	22
1923		
29 Jan./10 Mar	The Prisoner of Zenda	5
12/24 Mar.	Quincy Adams Sawyer	2
26 Mar./14 Apr.	Peg O' My Heart	2½
16/28 Apr.	Trifling Women	2
?	Enemies of Women	
10 Sep./20 Oct	If Winter Comes	6
26 Nov./20 Jan.	Down to the Sea in Ships	8
1924		
24 Jan./16 Feb.	Crossing the Great Sahara	3
18 Feb./15 Mar.	Anna Christie	4
17 Mar./12 Apr.	Secrets	4

DATES	TITLE	WEEKS	DATES	TITLE	WEEKS
1928				Magdana's Donkey	
10 Sep./21 Oct.	Simba	6		Carnival Nights	
1929				Skanderberg	
13/19 May	Strange Cargo	1		Twelfth Night	
20 May/9 Jun.	Mother's Boy	3		Georgian Ballet	
1930				The Great Height	
11 Mar.	Hunting Tigers Out in India	? 3		The Rummyantsev Case	
? 31 Mar.	Simba	? 1		Antartica	
7/26 Apr.	The Queen's Necklace	3		The Safety Match	
7/13 Jul.	One Family	1		The Grasshopper	
1931				Beneath the Pacific	
27 May./26 Apr.	Tell England	5		The Doughnut	
2/12 May	Fra Diavolo			Girl in the Jungle	
	and Song of the Alps	1½		Old Khottabych	
13/30 May	Birth of a Nation	2½			
1932					
21 Sep./Nov./4 Dec.	Grand Hotel and Reunion	10½			
1933					
6 Sep./29 Oct.	Dinner at Eight	8½			
1935					
6 Mar./8 Apr.	David Copperfield	8			
1936					
22 May/21 Jun.	The Robber Symphony	5			
1937					
24 Mar./13 Jun.	The Good Earth	12			
1938					
29 Sep./13 Nov.	C. B. Cochran's Flashbacks The Evolution of the Movies, 1838-1938	6½			
1940					
18 Apr./9 June	Gone with the Wind	7½			
1947					
6/27 Jul.	Henry V	3			
1956					
15 Jul./4 Aug	Greta Garbo Season Queen Christina Ninotchka	1½ 1½			
1957					
9 Jun./10 Aug.	Film Season Aida and The Red Balloon The Great Lover and M. Hulot's Holiday	4 5			
3/30 Nov.	Soviet Film Season Man and Beast Sputnik The Forty First Petrovedts Russian Holiday	4			

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 "Moving Pictures" invade Variety:" I am grateful to Barry Anthony and Richard Brown, whose researches have provided much of the information given in this section. Reference, with regard to various dates in 1896, has also been made to *When the Movies Began ...*, compiled by Stephen Herbert, The Projection Box, 1994

2 *The Entr'acte*, 28 March 1897.

3 John Barnes MBKS, *The Rise of Cinema in Gt. Britain*, Vol. 2, *Jubilee Year, 1897*, 1983, pp.143-150.

4 Quoted in Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill*, Voll. II, Heinemann, 1967, p.409.

5 See Allen Eyles: *Sol Levy*, *Midlands Pioneer* in *Picture House*, No. 8, Spring 1986, pp. 3-11.

6 *The Bioscope*, 2 June 1921, p.11.

7 Vivian Van Damm, *Tonight and Every Night*, Stanley Paul & Co., 1952, p.59.

Graeme Cruickshank is the Archivist of the Palace Theatre.



This picture and première announcement bottom right of p8 from Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson collection.

ALIGHT IN THE DARK: Pearce Signs



Pictures from the Company Archive



ALTHOUGH many companies practised in the sign business and worked for various cinema operators, Pearce Signs is the best known. It was founded by the late J. H. G. Pearce, usually known as Harold Pearce. He provided the signs for Odeon cinemas from the very first one at Perry Barr and is credited with devising the distinctive Odeon logo which remains in use to this day. A small and uneven selection of photographs recording the company's work has survived the years in the offices of Pearce Signs and we are grateful to Brian H. Pearce, son of the founder, for allowing us to reproduce almost all of them here.

The illustration (p11) shows signwriting and gilding in the workshop of Pearce Signs circa 1937. Most of the work seen in progress here is for shops and pubs but the sign at right is for an unidentified cinema site.

ODEONS BY NIGHT

Early Odeons had halo name signs – where the letters were backlit.

On p11 is the Odeon at South Harrow in 1933 with the name in letters 3 ft. high. The deep central recess above ground floor level is floodlit. Note the distinctive lettering on the canopy.

Above right is the Odeon at Worcester Park, Surrey, from 1934, with halo sign and neon outlining in red emphasising the height and width of the building.

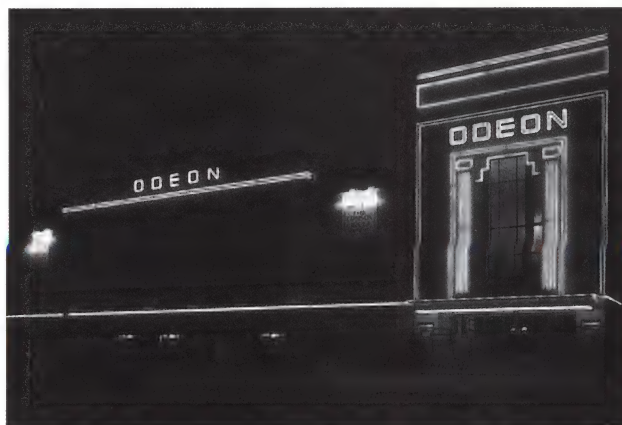
At right is the Odeon at Wallington, Surrey, as it looked in 1934, with the name in letters 3 ft. high and a plainer style of canopy lettering. This was on a corner, allowing for a dramatic emphasis with horizontal neon strips.

Later in the 1930s, the Odeon sign had neon placed on the letters, seen here at the Odeon Southall, Middlesex, in outline on the main sign and seemingly in single line on the more widely spaced sign on the side wall. The capitals and fluting on the pilasters flanking the tall window have been emphasised by neon. This photograph dates from 1936.

Two 1937 Odeons are seen by night at Forest Gate in East London (bottom of this page) and opposite at Redhill, Surrey. At Redhill, Pearce Signs' installation consisted of 280 ft. of blue outlining, 167 ft. of gold outlining, and two 42 inch name signs (one red, one gold) plus another 36 inch one in gold. (The signs not visible would have been on side walls or on the pylon erected at the front of the carriageway leading up to the entrance.) This Odeon is now a nightclub.

Pearce Signs' early cinema work was not confined to Odeons. An undated sign appeared at the Dominion Tottenham Court Road, possibly from 1930 when it opened and certainly some time during the decade. The Dominion survives as a theatre.

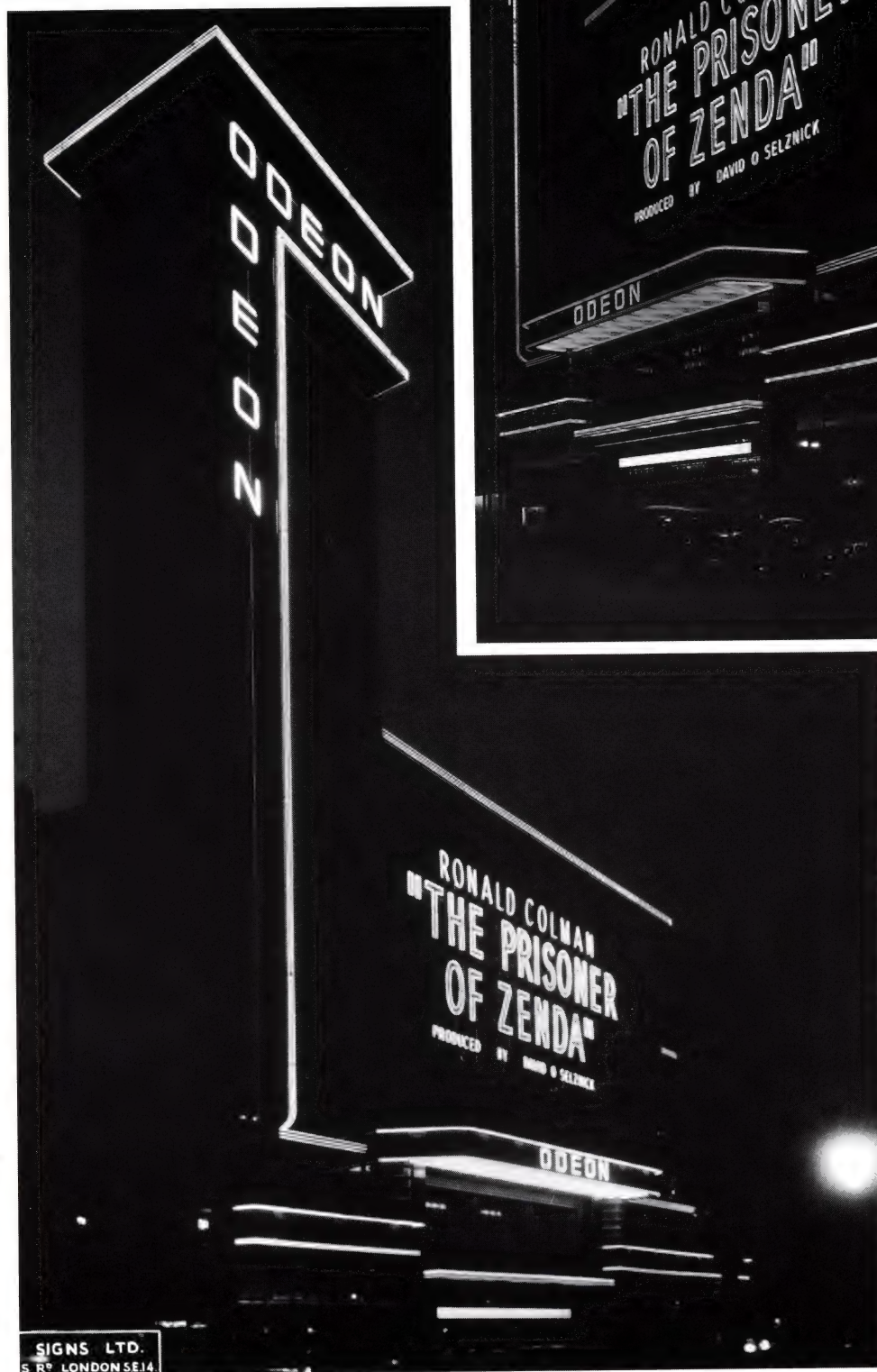
Also opposite is the Forum at the junction of Lime Street and Elliot Street in Liverpool. Judging from the lack of stills and posters around the doors, this was before its opening by ABC in May 1931. The original photograph is coloured to indicate that the Forum sign and outer neon (including the strip on top of the canopy) was in red and the inner neon around the Forum sign and downwards was in green. The cinema still stands as the ABC.





This photograph, taken in early 1935, shows an elaborate neon installation at the Regal Beckenham, Kent. The cinema is still open as the ABC.

Pearce's work on the Odeon Leicester Square. The night-time shot below, taken when it opened in November 1937, has often been reproduced but is a reminder of the huge amount of neon used. That outlining the top of the tower is particularly elaborate. The view from the other end of the frontage is less familiar and shows the various neon strips on the frontage turning the corner at the near end.





This photograph of the Odeon Brighton from autumn 1949 shows what must have been one of the first “ice boxes” replacing the older style canopy. Before the war the six vertical ribs and the flanking lines that turn a right angle were all picked out in neon. The Odeon has been demolished after replacement by a newer building.



Above, of poorer photographic quality, are two high angle shots of the Odeon from a few months after opening. The daytime view taken in March 1938 is of interest in showing the railings on top of the tower and the pitched roof of the auditorium. The night-time view dates

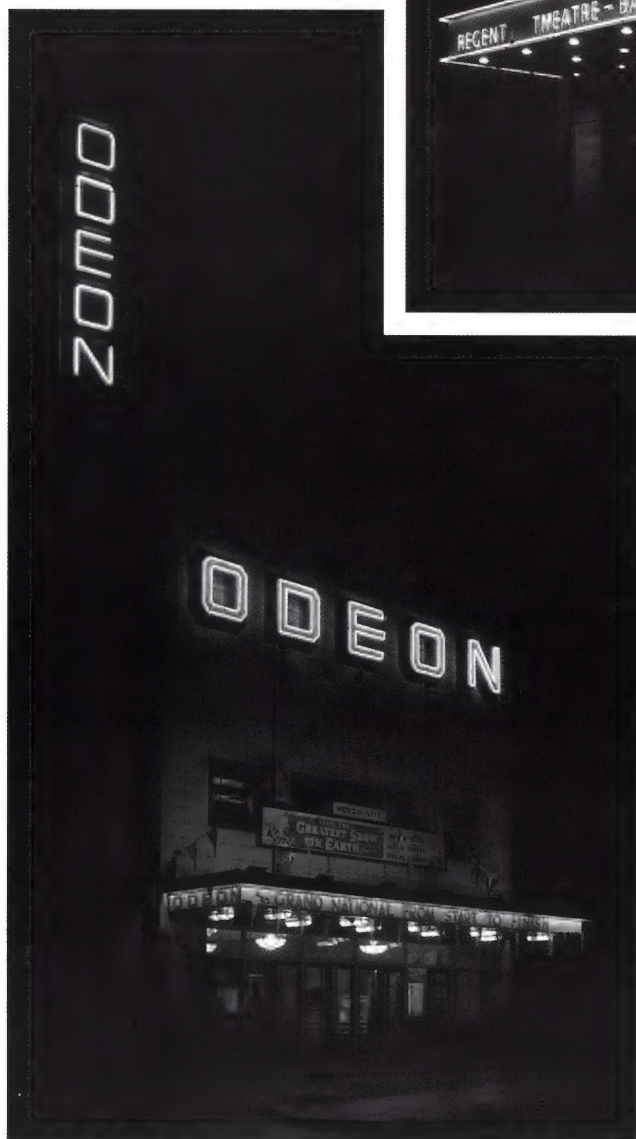


from the following month. Below left is the much simpler use of neon after the war, minus the strips to emphasise the building’s shape. The Blue Lamp played in early 1950. The Odeon remains the circuit flagship with the neon signs on the tower still maintained.

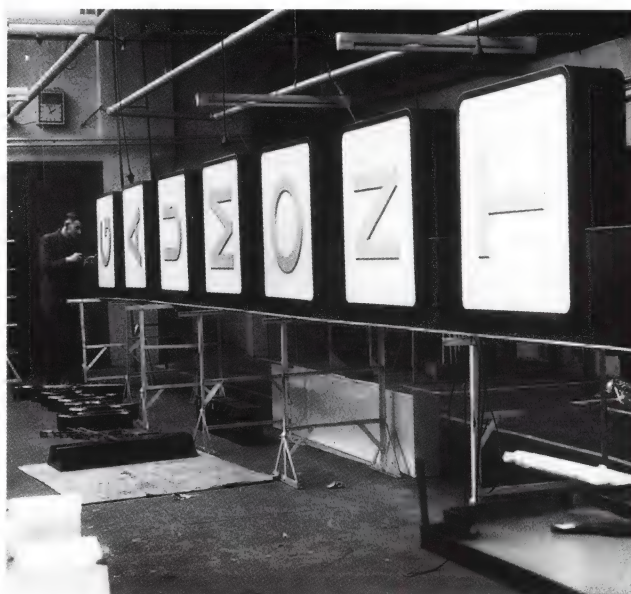


New lighting for the traditional style of canopy at the Odeon Well Hall, South East London, is seen in March 1950, with and without queues. This Odeon is now the independently-run Coronet.

The view below of the Odeon Acton, West London, dates from 1952 and shows the tower being used for a second name sign visible from further away. The Odeon closed in 1975.

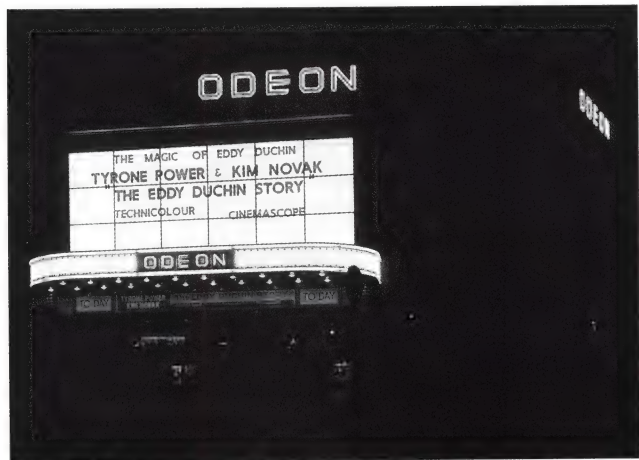


After Odeons and Gaumonts came under the same control, Pearce Signs carried out work on many of the latter. Top right, a new canopy for the Regent Brighton is seen in 1954. Centre Right is the entrance to the Gaumont Haymarket in London's West End in Spring 1950. The Gaumont sign seen being finished off in the factory may have been the one installed at the new Gaumont Barnsley, Yorkshire, seen opposite in a 1955 night shot. Another new cinema was the Odeon at Sheffield, opened in July 1956 and seen in day and night shots.





In 1962, Pearce Signs put up this elaborate sign at the Majestic Leeds for Top Rank dancing that includes the Man with the Gong trademark. Someone has commented on the back of the photograph: "Horrid! over £1,000!!" Posters for the screen attraction at the Majestic with arrow signs pointing to the cinema entrances can be seen to either side of the dance hall entrance. The Majestic is now a club.



Pearce commissions in 1967 included 4 ft. 6 in. high acrylic letters for the Odeon sign at the new Odeon Marble Arch in central London and a new style of sign for the Granada circuit's cinema at Sydenham, South East London.



Pearce Signs continue their long association with Odeon by providing this sign for the circuit's multiplex at Romford.

SHE'D NEVER BEEN TO THE PICTURES

A special show for cinema cashier

EVERY week hundreds of people ask Miss Mary Cummings, cashier at a local cinema, what the film is like and whether it is worth seeing. But none of them realise that until this week she had never in her life "been to the pictures."



A popular stunt in the heyday of cinema showmanship was the screening of a film specially for a lone viewer. The excuses for the showings were varied and ingenious. Here are some examples of how one manager, Brian Gauntlett, used and re-used the stunt at various Granada cinemas (or Theatres, as they were always known), together with some of the resulting press coverage.

First comes an example of a woman journalist being dared to sit through a horror film alone, *Tales of Terror* at the Granada Aylesbury in 1963. Then Brian remembers putting on a special screening for the nightwatchman while he was at the Granada Grantham about a year later. Another was a midnight showing of *Bonnie and Clyde*, arranged for the chief projectionist at the Granada Bishops Stortford in February 1968 – because, of course, a chief projectionist was always too busy working to enjoy the show.

But it was at the Granada flagship at Tooting, South London, that Brian put this stunt to greatest effect. In 1968 he exploited the horror angle again – with a woman watching the chiller *Day of the Triffids* on her 21st birthday all on her own. In the following year, the cashier was honoured with a solitary show of *Carry On Up the Khyber* – because she was always too busy selling tickets

happy. "The two jobs are entirely different," she said, "and I like meeting people at the cinema."

She deals with several thousand people each week; on Sunday, for instance, 1,900 people saw the film. Yet often people ring up and ask "has a lady in a red coat gone in" or similar questions, which she can't possibly answer.

But she does get to know regular cinemagoers, and in quieter periods she might get time to have a word with them. Mary is not allowed to eat on duty, but often people bring her sweets, and at Christmas she was overwhelmed by the number of people who brought her small presents.

"The poorer they are, the more likely they are to bring something," she said.

The one thing she does not like about the job are the unpleasant telephone calls made by people with nothing better to do.

Although Mary cannot remember all the people she sells tickets to, she can tell you to within half an hour what time the ticket was issued.

She made the most of her opportunity on Monday evening by finding out how the projection room works too, and meeting the projectionist. Normally she is not allowed to use the staff room or to mix with other members of staff – a company ruling to prevent any possibility of "working a fiddle."

Everyone seems to regard her as a problem solver, and people who ask for help range from those who have lost their false

ALONE IN THE DARK: A Trick of the Trade

As applied by
BRIAN GAUNTLETT

to catch the start of a main feature.

Then, just a year later, Gauntlett scored a hat-trick at Tooting by screening the Disney film *Jungle Book* for a ten-year-old girl, gaining front page coverage in much of the national press and in regional newspapers as far away as Doncaster and Glasgow (three pieces at least here in the girl's home town) as well as a radio interview. Not mentioned to the press was the fact that the girl was a niece of one of the Granada's projectionists. However, it remained true that she was on holiday and would miss the Disney film at Tooting because it opened after she went back (but, then, couldn't she have seen it back in Glasgow?). No matter. It worked. Gauntlett received special publicity prizes of £10 from head office and from the Walt Disney company for this, as well as a personal letter of congratulation from Granada chief Sidney Bernstein and a celebratory lunch at Claridges from the Disney organisation.

As Brian recalls, it was always better to involve the press indirectly. At Tooting, all the lights visible from outside were left on for the little girl's screening and someone not directly connected to the cinema then rang the local newspaper to alert them to something unusual going on. This way, a reporter would check up and find the story for himself.

Women's Column

A NIGHT ALONE IN THE CINEMA

HAVE you ever been alone watching a human head being tossed from one person to another, or the decomposing flesh dripping from a man's face? These things have certainly never appealed to me, so I was rather surprised to find myself the sole member of the audience for a private showing of a horror film, "*Tales of Terror*," at the Granada theatre.

I went along to the cinema after being challenged by the Manager, Mr. Brian Gauntlett, to go and see the film late one night.

When I arrived there at about 10.30 p.m., the place was in darkness and I was let in by a side door. The majority of the staff had gone

home, leaving the projectionist, manager and assistant manager and myself in the building.

I settled myself in the back row—in case I wanted to make a hasty exit. I have since been told that I was cheating by sitting there. "You don't get that feeling of emptiness from the back, you know!"

The lights went down and there I was, alone in the vast cinema. When my eyes grew accustomed to the dark I looked around. The place seemed to have grown to 20 times its normal size in a matter of seconds.

A complete and eerie silence had settled. On to the screen flashed the title of the film and once again darkness fell. Suddenly the sound of human heart beats shattered the

silence. A booming voice informed me that the beating heart was that of a dying man, and that I was to see three tales involving death.

No Coughing

It's surprising how different it is to see a film from an empty auditorium. There is no coughing, sneezing or rustling of sweet papers. The viewer can give her undivided attention to the film. I really found it was rather like watching a glorified television production—in full colour.

I found myself giving far more attention to the production side than I usually do. I wondered how such revolting cobwebs could be produced in a studio and if the gigantic spiders used really were alive and tame, or just models.

A film show for cinema worker

FOR nearly 36 years Mr. Ernest Tilley, of Hatfield Broad Oak, has been a cinema projectionist, and during that time has hardly even seen a film all the way through.

But on Sunday night a special show was provided for Mr. Tilley, who sat alone in the circle of the 860-seat Granada Theatre, Bishop's Stortford, to watch "Bonnie and Clyde."

The two-hour film was shown by Mr. Brian Gauntlett, the cinema manager.

Said Mr. Tilley, a married man with two children: "A projectionist has to change the reels regularly throughout the film and make sure that everything works properly, so he never really has a chance to see a film all the way through."

"If I want to see a film I have to go to the cinema on my day off."

During his career he has probably seen only half a dozen films all the way through.

"I can't remember when I saw the last one," said Mr. Tilley, who lives at Barnfield, Hatfield Broad Oak.

After watching the midnight movie Mr. Tilley said: "I thought that technically 'Bonnie and Clyde' was a very good film, and it was certainly a novel experience watching it from the audience point of view."

DAILY SKETCH

CINEMA PUTS ON A SHOW FOR ERNIE

"Tales of Terror," as the title denotes, is not the usual full-length horror film, but consists of three short stories.

One tells what happens after death, the second how a black cat brings about the death of a drunkard and the third focuses on the events when the mind of a man is suspended at the moment of death.

Camouflage

Unusual camera angles and scenes in different shades of one colour, camouflage the gruesome scenes. I admired the use of shots which made the watcher feel that distorting mirrors were being used, again hiding scenes which would have been very unpleasant if seen in the ordinary way.

Although not at all frightened at the idea of seeing this film alone, I still suffered from an odd creeping sensation! The sort of feeling that something like a spider was crawling on or near me. It was silly really, for I knew that there was nothing there.

Still, I'm very glad that I accepted that challenge, otherwise I should have missed one

A midnight film show for one man

By KEVIN HUNT

A CINEMA put on a midnight performance last night of "Bonnie And Clyde" for a very special audience... just one man.

Sitting alone in the circle of the 860-seat Granada cinema at Bishop's Stortford, Herts, was 50-year-old Mr. Ernest Tilley.

Mr. Tilley, of Barnfields, Hatfield Broad Oak, Essex, spends nearly every night of his life at the cinema—as a projectionist.

"When I am working, everybody else is having a good time," he told the manager, Mr. Brian Gauntlett.

So Mr. Gauntlett offered to treat him to a special performance. And when the cinema closed to the public last night Ernest, thirty-six years in the cinema business, took his seat while the manager took over the projection box.

A FILM was screened at an 860-seat cinema last night—just for one man.

And he was the projectionist of the Granada cinema at Bishops Stortford, Herts, 50-year-old Mr. Ernest Tilley.

Mr. Tilley, of Hatfield Broad Oak, Essex, has been a projectionist for 36 years, but is normally too busy to watch the film.

He did not want to miss this week's feature, so manager Mr. Brian Gauntlett put on the special show.

The film: "Bonnie And Clyde."

of the best films I have seen this year.

I feel I must add that although this film has an "X" certificate and was described to me as a horror film, I found it very amusing to watch, and afterwards discovered that it had been publicised as a comedy-horror production.

At least, it seemed very funny while I was watching it. When I described it later, I realised that the basic plots of the tales were horrific, to say the least.

It turned out that two of the things I had been told about cinemas at night were completely untrue. Firstly, I was told that they get very cold at night, and secondly, that they creak a great deal. I found it very warm and quiet. In fact, it was so quiet that even a single cough echoed round and round.

I have been trying to decide if I would go to a cinema alone again if asked, and I think the answer would be yes, on one condition—that the film is in colour. That way I can always convince myself that the "blood" is tomato sauce!

Linda wins her 'bubbly'

THE lights dimmed and a lone girl sat in the stalls of one of the largest cinemas in London to watch a midnight horror movie—and as the credits came up she celebrated her 21st birthday.

Linda Young, of Parsons Mead, Croydon, celebrated her coming-of-age by winning a bet with her boy friend, 23 year old Mel Priddle, assistant manager of the Granada Cinema, Tooting.

He bet her a magnum of champagne that she could not stay alone in the cinema and watch "The Day of the Trifids."

But 21 years to the minute after she was born, Linda, a student at Croydon Technical College, sat alone and watched the show.



LINDA MAKES IT A HORRIFIC 21st BIRTHDAY

IT all began as a joke and then became a bet, ending with Linda Young spending her 21st birthday on Monday sitting alone in Tooting's Granada Cinema watching a horror film into the early hours of the next morning.

Her verdict. "It was a super way to spend a 21st birthday. It was a very unusual sensation sitting all on my own and the film was great."

Linda, of 14 Parsons Mead, West Croydon, accepted the bet from her boy friend, Mel Priddle, assistant manager of the cinema, to sit alone in the huge auditorium to watch "The Day of the Trifids."

Said Linda, who is studying sociology, biology and physics at Croydon Technical College, "I jumped at the chance when the offer was made."

"It was a little eerie at first, but I am a real horror film addict and soon got so wrapped up in the film that I forgot I was on my own. I don't find these sort of films frightening, just fascinating."

Said 23-year-old Mel, who lives at 136 Reform-st., Battersea, and met Linda while he was assistant manager at the Granada, Thornton Heath, "I gave her a bottle of champagne for winning the bet."

"I think she was very brave to sit alone although the manager and I were in the cinema's office."

Linda was also presented with a box of chocolates by the manager, Brian Gauntlett.

Linda will be going to the same cinema every night next week to see a different horror film which is being shown each day.

ALONE IN GRANADA

Girl Sees Horror Film

A West Croydon girl took on a bet with her boyfriend that she could not sit alone in a cinema at night watching a horror film—and won!

On Monday night at 11 p.m., Miss Linda Young, of Parsons Mead, celebrated her 21st birthday by sitting alone in the Granada, Tooting, watching "Day of the Trifids".

The only other people in the building were the manager, Mr. Brian Gauntlett, and the assistant manager, who stayed in their office, and the chief projectionist.

Linda watched the film through to the end without screaming and was rewarded with a big kiss from her boyfriend, a bottle of champagne, and a large box of chocolates from the cinema.

3,000-seat London cinema

A MEATH GIRL who featured in the news in London last week was Miss Mary Cummins (26), Kiltale, Dunsany, a part-time cashier in a Tooting cinema since she went to the English capital two years ago. She was the only viewer in the 3,000-seat Granada Cinema, Tooting, for a special showing of the feature film, "Carry On Up The Khyber."

During the day she does a clerical job with a large manufacturing company in south-west London, so her opportunities to see a film right through are scant.

It was a remark she made to this effect that led cinema manager, Mr. Brian Gauntlett, to arrange a special showing of last week's feature so that Miss Cummins, for the first time in two years, "could see a film right through."

One night last week, around 11.30, as the patrons departed, she took her seat in the front row of the circle. Only others in the cinema were Mr. Gauntlett, working in his office, and the chief projectionist in the operating box. Miss Cummins had not even noticed that she had the vast cinema to herself.

SOUTH LONDON PRESS

Midnight matinee

For more than two years Mary Cummins had not seen a film at the cinema because she works during the day and evenings.

So at midnight on Monday she sat alone in the centre of the 3,000-seat Tooting Granada Cinema and watched a showing of "Up the Khyber" staged specially for her.

Miss Cummins (26), of 110 Tooting Bec rd., Tooting, does clerical work at Airfix, the Wandsworth model-makers, in the day time and is cashier at the cinema during the evening.

DAILY SKETCH

Mary gets a midnight movie to herself

A CINEMA put on a special performance last night — for its cashier.

For 26-year-old Mary Cummins has not seen a film all the way through in the two years she has worked at the Granada in Tooting, SW.

So after the customers left last night Mary stayed behind to watch "Carry On Up The Khyber."

The only other people in the 3,000-seat building were manager Brian Gauntlett and his chief projectionist.

Mary of Tooting Bec road, Tooting, said later: "I have never been able to see a film all the way through because I have another job during the day and I am busy at my desk each night."

"When Carry On came along I saw the trailer and thought it was very funny."

"I told Brian and the next thing I knew he had arranged the special showing."

Mr. Gauntlett, aged 33, said: "It was the least we could do. She is a very good worker and deserved the treat."

Cinema Cashier Never Saw A Film

Special Showing At Granada

Twenty-six year-old Miss Mary Cummins, of Tooting Bec Road, Upper Tooting, has been an evening cashier at the Granada, Mitcham Road, Tooting, for two years, ever since she came to this country from Ireland.

But she has never seen a film in England, because she also works during the day, as a clerk with Airfix, Earlsfield.

So on Monday night, after the evening programme, a special showing of "Carry On Up The Khyber" was presented — just for Mary.

Surrounded by 2,999 empty seats she watched the film, and reported afterwards that she had greatly enjoyed it.

The only other people in the cinema were the general manager, Mr. Brian Gauntlett, and his chief operator.

DAILY EXPRESS

Preview girl

The 3,000 seat Granada Cinema at Tooting—put on a solo showing of "Jungle Book" for Patricia McGee, aged 10, of Glasgow, last night after Patricia appealed that she had to return to Scotland before the film was due to open next week.

IN AN EMPTY GRANADA

Young Scottish Visitor
Sees Special Showing Of
"Jungle Book"

Patricia Mary McGee age 10 of South Portland Street, Glasgow a Scottish girl on holiday in London with her aunt sat in the empty Granada Theatre, Mitcham Road, Tooting after the theatre closed on Monday evening and saw a special showing of the Walt Disney film "Jungle Book".

The visitor from Scotland and her aunt have been staying with a friend Mrs. Cooper in Valney Street, Tooting and she was making her first visit to London.

Met Brian Gauntlett

She was in the Granada last week when she met Mr. Brian Gauntlett the general manager. Patricia expressed a wish to see the film "Jungle Book" before she returned home.

As the film will not start its week's run in Tooting until next Sunday and Patricia is going home on Saturday, Mr. Gauntlett announced to his visitor:

"We will get a special copy of the film and if you like to come to the Granada on Monday evening we will show it especially for you after the last performance."

In the empty 3,000 seater Granada on Monday young Patricia McGee and her aunt accompanied by general manager Mr. Brian Gauntlett saw the film and afterwards Mr. Gauntlett presented his young visitor with a long playing record of "Jungle Book."



Film show—for one little girl

THE manager of the Granada Tooting, Britain's largest cinema, arranged a special late night show for an audience of one on Monday—despite the film being on release just across London at Romford.

Mr. Brian Gauntlett, arranged the showing at the cinema in Mitcham-rd., after a little Scots girl learned that her favourite film "Jungle Book" was on a week after her London holiday was due to end.

Mr. Gauntlett contacted the Walt Disney chiefs in London and they had the cartoon film

rushed to Tooting in advance which is how 10-year-old Patricia McGee of South Portland-st., Glasgow, came to be sitting alone in the cinema late on Monday night.

Mr. Gauntlett told the South London Press "This little girl was so upset that I decided to do something about it. Patricia really enjoyed herself and now she has something to tell her friends about when she goes home."

Patricia, who came to London with her aunt was staying with friends at Valney-st., Tooting.

SOUTH LONDON PRESS



Baloo the Bear.

Little girl who got a cinema all to herself



Bagheera the panther

OR HOW PAT GOT TO SEE JUNGLE BOOK



Patricia sees her special showing of Jungle Book.

Standard Reporters

BRITAIN'S largest cinema put on a special show last night for an audience of one.

For when 10-year-old Patricia McGee learned that her favourite film "Jungle Book" was showing a week after her London holiday was due to end, she burst into tears.

That's when the manager, Mr. Brian Gauntlett, 36, of the 3000-seater Granada Cinema, Tooting, decided to make a special appeal to Walt Disney chiefs in London.

When they heard of the little Scots girl's heartbreak, they agreed to rush a copy of the children's cartoon film to the cinema in advance.

Circle seat

And that's how Patricia, of South Portland Street, Glasgow, came to be sitting in a circle seat, alone, in the vast empty auditorium of the South London cinema last night.

For one and a quarter hours little pony-tailed Patricia in her yellow party dress had the entire staff waiting on her. As she watched the film she was served with ice-cream, popcorn and drinks.

Afterwards, hugging herself with happiness, and clutching a record album of the film, presented to her by the manager, she said:

"I came on holiday with my auntie and I saw that Jungle Book was playing here.

"But when I asked, the man said it wouldn't be for two



Ten-year-old Patricia McGee has the wide expanse of the Granada, Tooting, all to herself.

weeks. By then, I would have been back in Glasgow.

"I was a bit upset, but the man said to come back, and then tonight I saw the whole thing on my own. It was a lovely film, and I enjoyed it a lot. Especially the elephants.

"I can't wait to tell my two brothers and my school friends all about it."

Mr. Gauntlett said: "Patricia seemed so sad when I told her. I could see she was going to cry—so in the circumstances what else could I do?"

Patricia has been staying with friends in Vainay Street, Tooting, on a week's holiday.

Showing — for audience of one

One of Britain's largest cinemas, the 3000-seat Granada at Tooting, London, put on a special show last night for an audience of one—10-year-old Patricia McGee, of South Portland Street, Glasgow.

The show was arranged by Mr. Brian Gauntlett, 36-year-old manager of the cinema, after he learned of the girl's disappointment because her favourite film "Jungle Book" was billed for

showing at the cinema a week after the end of her London holiday.

Mr. Gauntlett said: "Patricia seemed so sad when I told her the film was not on. I could see she was going to cry—so what could I do?"

During the special showing Patricia was served with ice cream, popcorn, and drinks. She said afterwards: "It was lovely, I enjoyed it a lot."

THE GIRL AMONG 2,999 EMPTY SEATS



BRITAIN'S largest cinema put on a special show last night — for an audience of one.

When 10-year-old Patricia McGee learned that her favourite film, *Jungle Book*, was showing a week after her London holiday ended, she burst into tears.

So Mr. Brian Gauntlett, aged 36, manager of the 3,000-seat Granada cinema in Tooting, made a special appeal to the Walt Disney organisation. When the Disney chiefs in London heard of Patricia's heartbreak they agreed to rush a copy of the film to the cinema a week in advance.

ELEPHANTS

That's how Patricia, of Glasgow, came to be sitting alone in the stalls of the vast empty auditorium, being served with ice cream, popcorn and drinks.

Patricia said: "It was a lovely film and I enjoyed it a lot. Especially the elephants. I can't wait to tell my two brothers and my schoolfriends all about it."

Mr. Gauntlett added: Patricia seemed so sad when I told her the film was not on. I could see she was going to cry — so in the circumstances what else could I do?"

In another world. Another time. Patricia McGee has eyes only for the screen at the Granada Cinema, Tooting.

LITTLE Patricia McGee sits alone in a darkened cinema... watching the film she's always wanted to see.

Patricia, 10, of South Portland Street, Glasgow, saw the billboards advertising the film — Walt Disney's *Jungle Book* — outside the Granada in Tooting, London, where she is on holiday.

But she was so disappointed when she found out that the film wasn't on until next week that the manager Brian

VIP film show for Patricia

Gauntlett decided to give her a special showing last night.

And so the little girl who loves animals had the cinema to herself with sweets, ice-cream and lemonade laid on.

Patricia
is V.I.P.
at cinema

BRITAIN'S largest cinema put on a special show last night for an audience of one — 10-year-old Patricia McGee, of South Portland Street, Hutchesontown, Glasgow.

When Patricia learned that her favourite film "*Jungle Book*" would be showing in London a week after her holiday there ended, she burst into tears.

And that's when the manager, Mr. Brian Gauntlett, of the 3,000-seat Granada Cinema in Tooting, South London, decided to make a special appeal to the Walt Disney organisation.

When the Walt Disney chiefs in London heard of the little Scots girl's heartbreak, they agreed to show a copy of the children's cartoon film at the cinema in advance.

And that's how Patricia came to be sitting in a circle seat, alone in the vast empty auditorium of the cinema last night.

For one and a quarter hours, little pony-tailed Patricia, in her yellow party dress, had the entire staff waiting on her. As she watched the film she longed to see she was served with ice-cream, popcorn and drinks.

Record album

Afterwards, hugging herself with happiness, and clutching a record album of the film, presented to her by the manager, she said: "I came on holiday with my auntie and I saw that '*Jungle Book*' was playing here."

"But when I asked, the man said it wouldn't be on for two weeks. By then, I would have been back in Glasgow."

"I was a bit upset, but the man said to come back, and then tonight I saw the whole thing on my own. It was a lovely film, and I enjoyed it a lot. Especially the elephants. I can't wait to tell my two brothers and my school friends all about it."

LORD BERNSTEIN, L.L.D. Chairman

GRANADA GROUP LIMITED

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Telegrams: Granada London

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PROMOTION



by
David
Jerome

Pat, 10, becomes VIP at special screening

LONDON evening newspapers along with the Daily Express gave a Granada showman the best free coverage he could ever hope for — all because of a little girl.

Patricia McGee, aged 10, from Glasgow, was almost in tears when she learned that her favourite film "*Jungle Book*" was showing at Tooting a week after her London holiday was due to end.

Manager Brian Gauntlett decided he would do something about this and approached Walt Disney who agreed to rush a copy of the children's cartoon in advance.

So Patricia watched the film alone — with the staff on hand to serve refreshments.

The idea of one person alone in a cinema has whiskers (particularly with horror films), but this gesture had a special ring. They tell me that as well as bringing one little girl a great deal of joy, Granada was equally pleased.

Granada and Disney thanked Gauntlett this week with a lunch and a £20 cheque.

Dear Brian Gauntlett,

Congratulations on your brilliant piece of showmanship in organising a special showing of *THE JUNGLE BOOK* for Patricia McGee. This was in the best Granada tradition and I am proud that Granada Theatres have on their staff managers who are able to think about publicity on such a high intellectual level.

Yours sincerely,

Sirney Benum

Brian Gauntlett Esq
Manager
Granada Theatre
Tooting, S W 17

10/WE/CPL

A midnight film show just for a little girl

THE 3,000-seat Granada Cinema at Tooting was empty at a special late-night show on Monday—except for one 10-year-old Scottish girl.

It wasn't because the film, Walt Disney's "Jungle Book," was a flop. On the contrary. All over the world, it has been a box-office success.

And it comes to Tooting on Sunday. But that was little consolation to Pat McGee, on holiday from Glasgow, because she returns home a day before it opens.

Pat fought to keep back the tears when Granada manager Mr. Brian Gauntlett told her the opening date. But, noticing the tears, Mr. Gauntlett, a 36-year-old father of three boys, phoned Walt Disney in London.

Yes, they said when they heard the story. They would certainly rush a special copy of the film down to Tooting for a special one-girl show.

And that was how Pat, whose first visit this is to London, came to have a show all to herself.

Her aunt, Miss Pat Carson, also from Glasgow, allowed little Pat to stay up late—for the "special" only began at 11 o'clock, after the last public show was over.

It was so much Pat's own show that not even her aunt was allowed in. And Mr. Gauntlett, abandoning his normal role, became usher and ice-cream server—the latter all free, of course.

To crown it all, Pat was presented with a record of the sound track from the film at the end.

"I'm absolutely thrilled," she said. "This has really made my holiday."

Later, Mr. Gauntlett said he laid on the treat because he could see she was disappointed at the idea of missing "Jungle Book."

"But if it hadn't had been for Walt Disney's co-operation, she would not have seen it anyway," he added.

After the show, Mr. Gauntlett was interviewed on the air by B.B.C. Radio "Late Night Extra."



The great adventure of Patricia McGee, seen at right with Granada Tooting manager Brian Gauntlett.

AND A CLASSIC POSTSCRIPT

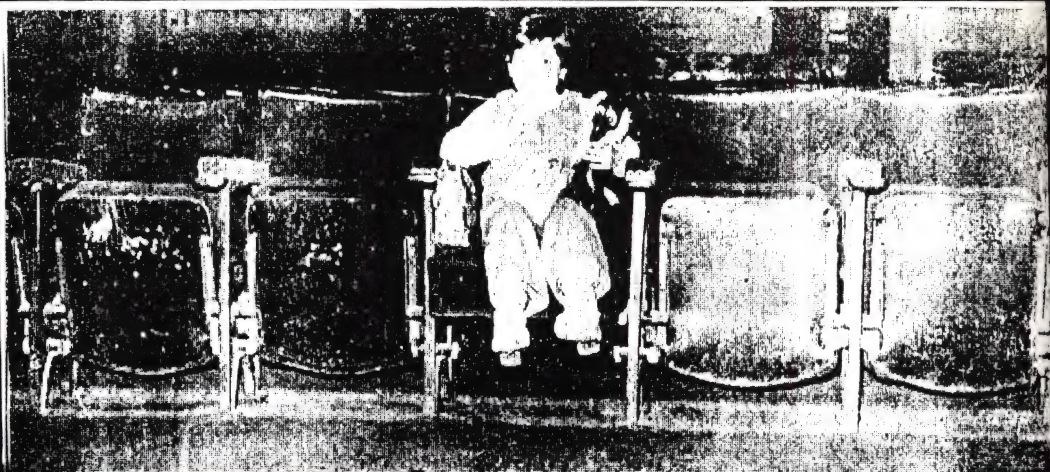
When Brian Gauntlett left Granada and became London area controller for Classic Cinemas, he encouraged managers to carry out more stunts—including the "lone viewer". Two examples of the latter took place in the same month of December 1970 at nearby cinemas.

A 77-year-old pensioner, Phoebe Dupare, missed a one day presentation of *Little Women*, based on her favourite book, at the Classic Kilburn, North London, because she had a hospital appointment for her chronic arthritis. She wrote to express her disappointment to the manager, Arthur Frost, who arranged a private Friday morning screening of the film as the guest of the management, with a taxi each way and tea during an intermission. She brought her 88-year-old sister for company so she wasn't quite alone in the dark. The story was featured in both the *Kilburn Times* and *Willesden Mercury* with pictures of the two sisters sitting in the auditorium.

And from the end of December 1970 comes the heart-warming story of the seven-year-old girl who ran through

the snow all on her own to attend a Saturday morning show at the Classic Hampstead, only to be informed by acting manager (and showbiz legend in his own right) Maurice Cheepen that no show had been scheduled because it was Boxing Day. However, as the *Hampstead News* (1 January 1971) put it, Cheepen "turned Father Christmas". A reporter explained: "Rather than disappoint her he invited her in. The projectionist was also in the cinema doing maintenance work so Mr. Cheepen called him and soon the lonely girl in the cold was a VIP watching her own cartoon show. Mr. Cheepen said, 'I saw a little girl standing outside—she looked cold and disappointed, almost in tears, so I invited her in. Laura... was treated to ice cream, drinks, and a present from the Christmas tree.'" A few days later, Laura and her mother acted as hostesses at a free cartoon show for children, handing out drinks and ice cream to the members of the Classic junior club. A picture of Laura sitting on her own at the cinema appeared with the article in the newspaper. At least three other papers carried the story. — Editor.

NOW HOW ABOUT THIS FOR SERVICE



Laura, watching her very own show.

LAURA, 7, GETS THE VIP TREATMENT

A CINEMA manager turned Father Christmas on Boxing Day morning when he saw a little girl standing out in the snow waiting for the cinema to open. Mr. Maurice Cheepen, temporary manager at the Classic Cinema, Pond Street, Hampstead, was preparing for the evening performance when he noticed seven-year-old Laura Austin, of Constantine Road, Hampstead, standing in the cold outside. He went out and told her that there was no Saturday morning show because it was Boxing Day. But rather than disappoint her he invited her in. The projectionist was also in the cinema doing maintenance work so Mr. Cheepen called him and soon the lonely girl in the cold was a VIP watching her own cartoon show. Mr. Cheepen said: "I saw a little girl standing outside—she looked cold and disappointed, almost in tears so I invited her in." Laura, who goes to Gospel Oak School, Mansfield Road, was treated to ice cream, drinks and a present from the Christmas tree.

When Laura returned home she told her mother, Mrs. Carinaleta Austin, that she had been to the cinema—just like any normal Saturday—but the first Mrs. Austin knew of the lone visit was when friends phoned her up and said they had read about Laura in a newspaper. On Wednesday this week Laura and her mother acted as hostesses at the Classic's free cartoon show for children. Together they handed out drinks, and ice cream, to regular members of the Classic Junior club.



THE CLASSIC, Kilburn, had its own very special premiere last Friday. Attending an exclusive screening of "Little Women" as guests of the management were two elderly sisters, one of whom had been upset at missing the screening of her favourite film.

Miss Phide Dupare, of Warrington Crescent, Maida Vale, had written telling the manager that she could not get along because of a hospital trip.

Manager Arthur Frost replied immediately inviting Miss Dupare to be his guest early Friday morning when the film would be shown just for her.

Mrs. Harriet Myers, 88, decided to accompany her sister when Mr. Frost arrived in a taxi to pick her up. They

... Film show for two!

saw the film, were treated to tea at intermission and sent back home by taxi — all courtesy of the Classic.

The two projectionists, Mr. Tom Sexton, of Willesden High Road and Mr. William Gamble, of Fordwych Road, Cricklewood, also gave their

time free. Mr. Frost came from Dunstable to manage the Classic 10 weeks ago.

The sisters were delighted. "It has done us a world of good and we are gratified to see that people can still be kind in this day and age," they wrote to him. (WM2)

Phoebe has her own film show

PENSIONER Phoebe Dupare's favourite book was "Little Women".

And she enjoyed the novel so much that she longed to see the film version that was given a special one-day showing at the Classic Cinema in Kilburn High Road.

But 77-year-old Phoebe had to miss the film, for it was being shown on a Thursday — the day of her weekly visit to the hospital for treatment of her chronic arthritis.

Phoebe wrote to tell the cinema's manager. Mr. Arthur Frost, now disappointed she was that she had to miss seeing the film. Kind-hearted Mr. Frost

was so touched by her letter that he went to great lengths to make her dream come true.

And on Friday the empty cinema was specially opened for two "VIPs".

Phoebe and her 88-year-old sister, Mrs. Harriet Myers, were Mr. Frost's guests at their own special showing of "Little Women".

"I went down to see Miss Dupare at her home in Warrington Crescent, Maida Vale, where she lives with her sister," said Mr. Frost.

"She was really disappointed at missing the film so I told her we were going to put it on especially for her and her sister on Friday morning.

She asked me if they could come in at pensioner rates and I told her they would be my guests," he added.

Phoebe and Harriet were given tea in the intermission and had a "rare old treat" said Mr. Frost.

He has since received a letter from Harriet thanking him for his kindness, in which she said: "It was a wonderful experience for us and has done my sister a world of good.

"In these days it is marvellous to find such kindness," she added.

After being driven to the cinema to see the film, they were driven home again — where they could recall the experience they would never forget.

LAURA, 7, GETS A VIP SHOW

SEVEN-YEAR-OLD Laura Austin ran all the way to her local cinema for the children's morning cartoon show—but it was Boxing Day and there was no show.

Laura burst into tears when relief manager Maurice Cheepen, who saw her standing forlornly in the snow outside the Classic Cinema at Hampstead, London, broke the news.

Mr Cheepen didn't hesitate—and within minutes Laura, of Constantine Road, Hampstead, was sitting in the deserted stalls enjoying an hour of cartoons all by herself. And on the way out she got presents from the foyer Christmas tree.

CINEMA OPENS—JUST FOR LAURA

LITTLE Laura Austin stood shivering and heartbroken in the snow outside her local cinema yesterday.

For Laura, aged seven, had run all the way from her home in Constantine Road, Hampstead, London, for the morning Junior Club cartoon show.

But as usual on Boxing Day there was no children's show.

Then she was spotted by Mr Maurice Cheepen, manager of the Classic Cinema.

"I asked her what was the matter and she said she had come to see the cartoons," he said.

Crying

"She was crying and blue with cold. As the cinema was being prepared for the ordinary performance we gave her a special show."

"She was given a free seat in the stalls and I got the projectionist to run through cartoons for her," said Mr Cheepen.

"I just couldn't leave her out in the cold and I thought I'd give her a little treat."

Laura saw cartoons including Laurel and Hardy and Donald Duck as she sat in the deserted stalls by herself.

As well as her hour-long "private view" Laura was given a toy dog and skittles from the Christmas tree in the foyer.

On Wednesday she will be back at the cinema—as a hostess to the annual free Junior Club show, where she will be helping to hand out ice creams.

Laura gets film show to herself

Seven-year-old Laura Austin went to her local cinema for a Boxing Day treat of cartoon films. But she had mistaken the day and found it closed.

As she stood in the cold outside the Classic Cinema, Hampstead, she was noticed by the relief manager Mr. Maurice Cheepen, who persuaded the projectionist to give an hour's cartoon show just for Laura. Then she was given presents from the Christmas tree and went home happy.

Re-Inventing Cinemas:

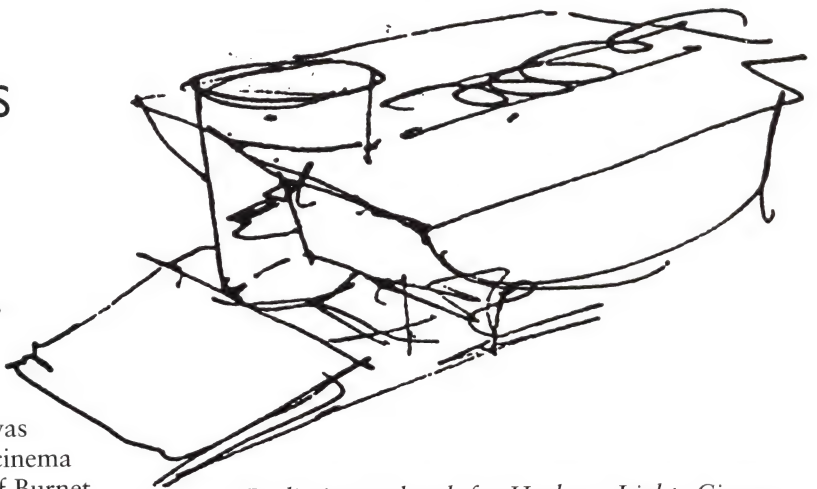
The Work of Burrell Foley Fischer

By DAVID TREVOR-JONES

CINEMA DESIGN since 1945 has produced few buildings of note in Britain. Ernö Goldfinger's Elephant and Castle Odeon of 1966 was the outstanding building of the post-war era, but was demolished in 1988. The Curzon Mayfair, a cinema beneath an office block by W. G. Hammond of Burnet, Tate and Lorne (also 1966) survives as the best of the otherwise undistinguished rest. The resurgence of cinema going in the UK in the late Eighties and Nineties has been associated with a building boom but it has not generated very much work for imaginative architects. Of the dozens of multiplexes that have mushroomed on out-of-town sites, few have aspired beyond crass signage and cheap, crudely applied 'deco-ism' to distinguish them from the D.I.Y. warehouses with which they were originally intended to be interchangeable.

Yet during this era of charmless, prefabricated cinema retail outlets an architectural practice of real imagination has been quietly re-inventing cinema design. Their first new free-standing cinema building was shortlisted for the Royal Fine Arts Commission *Sunday Times* Building of the Year award in 1995. It came runner up in its category to Richard Rogers' Channel 4 Headquarters. The building is the Harbour Lights Cinema at Ocean Village in Southampton and the architectural practice is Burrell Foley Fischer.

Whilst the acclaim for Harbour Lights has brought Burrell Foley Fischer to the attention of a wider public, their theatre and cinema work has been growing for more than a decade. A distinctive style, emerging from the partners' ideas of what cinema architecture should set out to achieve, has developed over a series of projects. I spoke to John Burrell and Stefanie Fischer at their offices in Covent Garden about those projects and the ideas that have coalesced through them.



Preliminary sketch for Harbour Lights Cinema.

John Burrell and Mark Foley founded Burrell Foley Associates in 1982 and Stefanie Fischer joined as an Associate in the same year, becoming a partner in 1985. The practice was renamed Burrell Foley Fischer in 1990. The cinema work has largely been led by Burrell, whose architectural background is from Oxford Polytechnic and the Architectural Association, and Fischer, whose architectural education was at Cambridge University. Burrell Foley Fischer has come to be known for work in building for the arts but the practice is very much more broad-based. Drawings scattered around their conference room represent housing and urban regeneration projects, and an intriguing proposal for the Millennium Exhibition. Burrell is a very fine illustrator and his exquisite elevation of Brighton's West Pier, made for a restoration scheme, was exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in 1983.

The partnership has been actively involved in research, ranging from John Burrell's R.I.B.A. funded investigation into urban design centred on re-using abandoned asylums through Mark Foley's work on spaces for dance training, rehearsal and performance to Stefanie Fischer's work with the British Film Institute on the technical design of cinemas for applicants for Arts Council lottery funding for cinema development and their architects. Burrell and Fischer share a strong commitment to urban

design and especially to designing in 'the public realm'. A recurring theme throughout our talk was the architects' aim of enticing people out of their private 'cocoon', their homes and cars, and into shared public spaces.

Each of Burrell Foley Fischer's projects is led by a partner, though a project architect often sees the scheme through on site and the design is worked on by a team. Burrell thinks it important that the partner gives the project 'the steer', but that other members of the design team challenge the partner's ideas to keep the product fresh.

The practice's early work in the arts field took them into the worlds of fringe theatre and dance, with projects at the Latchmere in Battersea (now the Grace Theatre at the Latchmere), the Almeida Theatre in Islington and with the Shared Experience Theatre Company. Their first cinema commission was for the design of the Metro in London's West End and came about through Burrell's involvement with Nick Hart Williams and Tony Kirkhope of The Other Cinema, a specialist distribution company. They had briefly operated the first Scala Cinema in a basement in Tottenham Street in 1976/77 and the company was granted £270,000 by the Greater London Council Arts and Recreation Committee in 1983 towards the creation of a central London venue for independent and 'progressive' film and video.

The site provided for the Metro was a subterranean shell originally intended for fringe theatre use, buried in the basement of the Trocadero Centre. The challenge was to fit it out as a two-screen cinema and to establish its presence on the barest minimum of frontage on Rupert Street within the limited budget. At least, with its separate entrance, it could be given a distinct identity unrelated to the mass appeal attractions above. From making virtues out of the spatial and budgetary stringencies came some of the ideas which have underpinned Burrell Foley Fischer's subsequent cinema work.

The architects first asked themselves the question, "What is the minimum you need to powerfully convey the image of the cinema?" The partners recall combing through hundreds of photographs of the cinemas of the golden pre-war era looking for unifying motifs

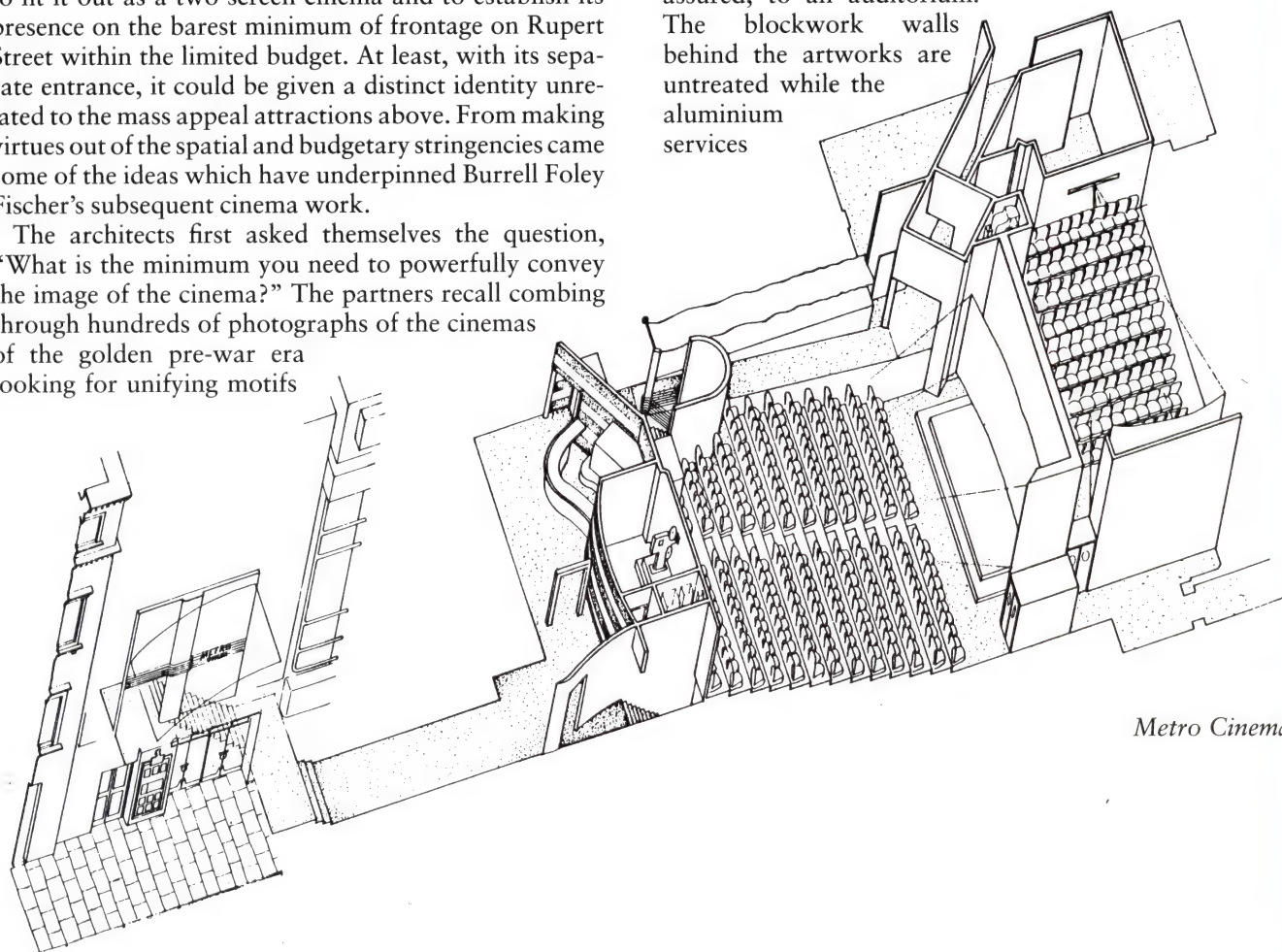
which led them eventually to a contemporary re-interpretation of 'deco'. A limited number of key elements make up the street front and foyer of the Metro: the curved kiosk front terminating in a rounded, stainless steel-banded pillar; the banding carried across the back wall; the mirror ceiling; the use of 'off the peg' door fittings to evoke the moderne style; and the canopy outside evoking the grandiose 'marquees' of American movie theatre street architecture.

Even without a giant projector mounted above the canopy and searchlights sweeping the facade – ideas lost to budgetary constraint in the final reckoning – the Metro's tiny street front succeeds in its aim of evoking 'cinema'. The use of evocative elements was to become less conscious but no less powerful in the practice's later buildings.

More recurrent Burrell Foley Fischer themes crop up for the first time beyond the Metro's box-office. Articulating the access to the underground cinemas, especially the smaller screen 2 in the area originally intended as a theatre stage, was a formidable problem. It was solved and turned to advantage by creating a path of discoveries, events on a journey from the street to the screen.

The corridor walls are a linear art gallery punctuated by the screen 1 foyer with its bar. Moderne touches sparingly applied, such as staircase railings, remind the traveller that this is still a cinema. One is not tentatively exploring a bland, plasterboarded corridor that might just lead to an emergency exit but instead one is led, reassured, to an auditorium.

The blockwork walls behind the artworks are untreated while the aluminium services



Metro Cinema

ducts are exposed overhead. Underfoot, the use of a very dark blue carpet is dramatic, as were the liner Queen Mary's black carpeted art deco interiors when unveiled in 1936.

The cost of this treatment is little different from that of the blandly emulsioned plasterboard, company-logoed carpet and acoustic-tiled ceiling of the retail multi-screen. Here in the circulation spaces, perhaps, is most graphically illustrated the contrast between Burrell Foley Fischer's carefully thought through cinemas and the accountancy-led, retail shed school of construction that holds sway in the mainstream of cinema development.

The Metro opened in October 1985 and "cut a dash" which led to further cinema work for Burrell Foley Associates. It also impressed their clients sufficiently that they have been asked to carry out all subsequent work on the building, most significantly the recent replacement of the canopy and interior refurbishment before re-opening following the cinema's closure during 1995/6 while the Trocadero was enlarged.

The following year Artificial Eye commissioned the practice to revamp the failed Gate Bloomsbury 1 and 2, a cinema with a chequered history which, according to Fischer, "looked like a launderette". This is another basement cinema, hidden beneath the Brunswick Centre, a strikingly idiosyncratic modernist development of shops and flats just to the south of Kings Cross in London. Its glass box-office emerges like a submarine's conning tower amid the pillars between the shops. This was resigned and lit so that it shone rather than cowered among the pillars, giving the Renoir, as the cinema was now renamed, the commanding street presence that it had disastrously lacked.

Down in the basement foyer, the bar was transformed with black lacquer, mirrors, lights, and a carpet designed to re-interpret the entrances to Thirties French apartment buildings. Students from the Slade School of Art created angular grey patterns on the cream walls. Burrell recalls that the deeply suspicious owners had cans of emulsion ready in the manager's office in case the result was too offensive. It wasn't, and since its launch in May 1986 the Renoir has enjoyed the success that evaded previous operators on the site. Burrell Foley Associates went on to advise on the long term upgrading of the Lumiere and the Chelsea Cinema, both Artificial Eye successes in the wake of Rank failure.

By now well established in the independent cinema and fringe theatre sector, Burrell Foley Associates were commissioned in spring 1986 to create an entirely new cinema together with conference and theatre studio spaces at the developing Riverside Studios arts centre on the Thames at Hammersmith. This differed from the practice's earlier commissions in that it was solely an interior fit-out. The arts centre was already well established so the insertion of the cinema auditorium into the BBC's former dubbing rooms involved only a response to a functional need.

The priorities were to provide luxuriousness, excellent sightlines and comfortable seats with stylistic references to the river and to the building's film studio heritage. The architect's response was to create steeply raked seating in two blocks separated by a centre aisle, the front row set well back from a huge screen filling most of the end wall.

The carpet covering the void area of the floor and aisles is Mark Foley's design, a shimmering of ripples on a deep blue background. The auditorium is essentially a black box, over whose walls have been laid bands of fabric-covered sound absorbent panels. These are buff coloured, picking up the ripples from the carpet, to the height of the top of the screen, and blue above. The ceiling is a grid of fifteen floating panels carrying the houselights, behind which concealed lighting glows and picks out glimpses of the building services. The cinema opened in November 1987 and with repertory programming it has become extremely popular, the crowds pointing up its awkward spiral stair approach and cramped upper foyer. Toilets and refreshments are a long way away!

The Riverside established the hallmarks of Burrell Foley Fischer's auditoria which were to be developed further in later projects. The unusually steep rake not only produces perfect sightlines but also, according to Burrell, invokes the feel of the traditional theatrical balcony while also creating a large useable foyer space beneath it. The practice is keen on very large screens. Burrell emphasises that scale is a key element in the experience of going to the cinema, remarking that "You can't have a huge vision-field-filling screen with curtains swishing in your living room" (Actually, curtains have not swished in many of Burrell Foley Fischer's auditoria to date! Budget pruning invariably seems to start with screen tabs.)

Swishing tabs aside, the admirer of the classic Granadas and Gaumont Palaces might find the typical Burrell Foley Fischer auditorium rather bland. Is there no room for fantasy in auditorium design any more? Burrell has several answers to this question. The most direct are the counter-questions: "What fantasy theme would have the same resonance now that the Gothic cathedral, high art deco and rocketship had in their day? How can the cinema designer compete with the luxury car interior?" The evocation of luxury and comfort for a modern audience is a very different proposition compared with responding to the expectations of the average audience member in the Thirties, Forties or even Sixties. "The stakes now are pretty high", he points out.

There is a parallel argument that cinema is a populist medium. There is a distinction between the feel of a cinema and that of a theatre or an art gallery. Opulent decor can be intimidating; Burrell thinks that cinema in old theatres feels uncomfortable because it is like "living in a converted church" and that Odeon moderne succeeded by drawing a clear stylistic distinction between cinemas and theatres.

My mother recalls going to the cinema as she grew up in Lewisham either side of the Second World War. She and her sisters hardly ever set foot in the Gaumont Palace because they found it intimidating. They went to the Rex instead because they felt more comfortable there. Rod Varley, the first manager of the Harbour Lights cinema which adjoins a conventional multiplex, found the same kind of perception alive and well in Southampton in 1996. Young people he spoke to about cinema-going recognised the multiplex as cheap and cheerful and "them"; anything too sophisticated was not "them". However, Varley also discovered the apparently contradictory view among his interviewees that the multiplex existed to part them from their money. They felt

'processed' by the concession counters in the multiplex and were impressed by the fact that no-one tried to sell them anything in the Harbour Lights, and that there were pictures to look at on the walls (a large part of the foyer doubles as an art gallery).

Fischer presents another view on the design of auditoria for today's audiences. Nothing must distract attention from the screen and dilute the intensity of the cinematic experience. At the same time, the space must engulf the patron with comfort whilst promoting the individual's sense of being part of a group. The individual's relationship with the film is highlighted by the sense of the shared experience: "How many people applaud at the end of a film on TV in their living room?", Burrell wonders. Fischer refers back to the very earliest days of cinema in bioscope tents where the collectiveness of the experience was essential. The crowds swooned before charging railway locomotives or oohed and aahed at the spectacle on the screen en masse. She suggests that the decoration of fantasy interiors carried on the theme of "cinema in the street", that the fairground lies close behind the Komisarjevsky interior.

I revisited the Harbour Lights whilst preparing this article and was particularly interested to look afresh at the auditoria. The panels standing proud of the wall and ceiling seem to exert a slight inward and downward thrust which subtly pushes the audience together. The acoustic is very dead. The overall effect as the lights go down is to create rather a womb-like atmosphere; one sinks into a large, embracing darkness which does seem both to engulf and to bring together the audience as Fischer intends.

Burrell Foley Fischer's work at the Broadway Media Centre in Nottingham commenced in 1990 with a feasibility study which identified a vision and overall development objective. The refurbishment of the existing cinema and foyers and the creation of a new 150 seat second screen, cafe/bar, video library and training facilities have been carried out in phases, the last of which is due for completion in September 1997. Various Burrell Foley Fischer trademarks are visible in the new auditorium such as the floating panel ceiling dotted with small lights. The rake is not as steep as in many of the practice's other auditoria as it was determined by balancing the maximum height attainable by the disabled access ramp from the foyer against achieving clear sightlines, but the screen is characteristically large. The best of the Fifties fixtures in the foyers will be retained in the completion phase, which will result in the creation of a new cafe and other front of house facilities.

The Broadway is a British Film Institute funded Regional Film Theatre. Commissions for development works at two other R.F.T.'s, the Tyneside in Newcastle and the Queens in Belfast, followed. Sadly, neither scheme has been put into effect. At the Queens, the brief was to upgrade what was effectively little more than a student film society based in two university lecture rooms to proper R.F.T. standards. Negotiations to use adjoining buildings and sites to provide a permanent box-office and cafe bar seem to have failed, though the cinema is very successful - despite rather than because of its facilities, suggests Fischer. At the Tyneside, the brief was to improve the rather poor access, seating and sightlines of

the second screen above the old news theatre and to provide more bar and foyer accommodation. This scheme, too, exists so far only on paper. However, the work clearly helped to establish the practice's profile at the B.F.I. and when the opportunity came along to build an entirely new R.F.T. the choice of architect must have been influenced by it.

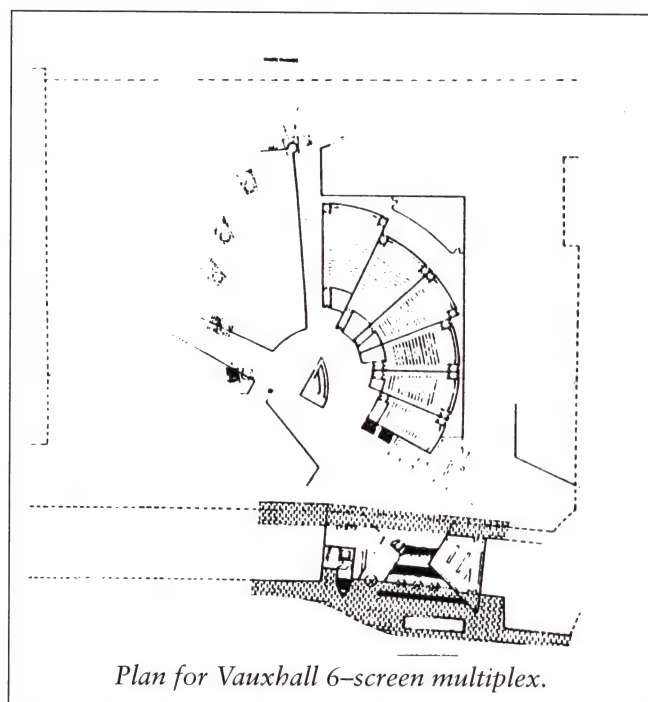
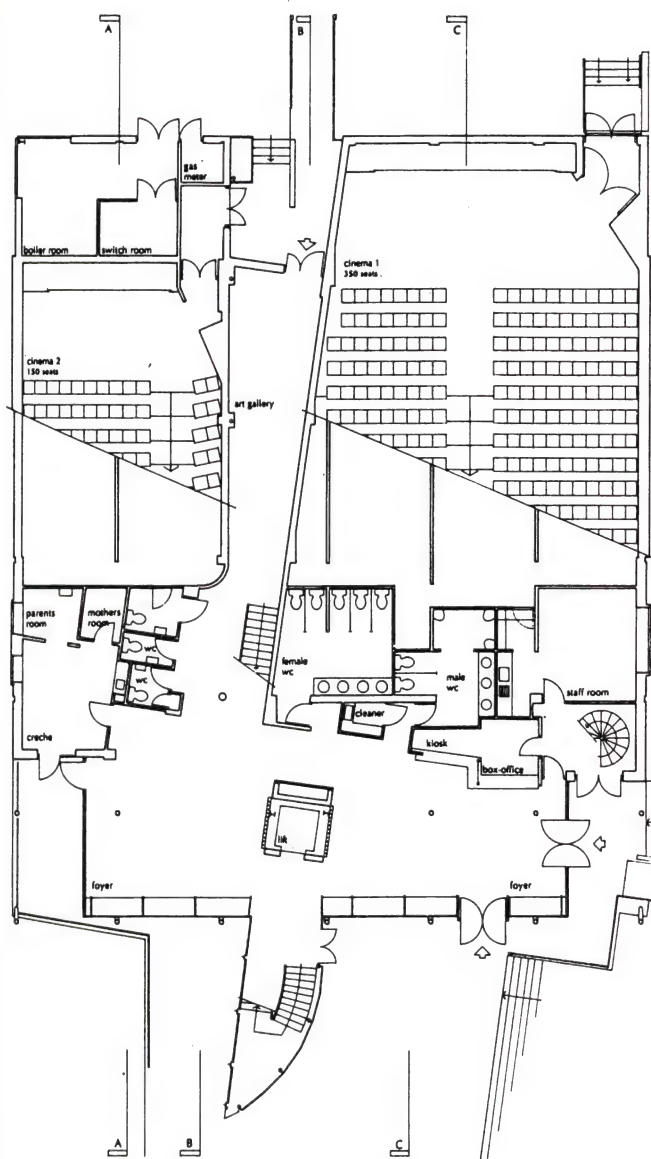
Ocean Village in Southampton has been at best a partially successful bid by the City Council to breathe life into a moribund dockland area. The outer dock was the P&O ferry terminal until the services were relocated to Portsmouth and it was the closest dock in the vast port to the city centre. The planning brief was aimed at providing an attractive and accessible adjunct to the established centre with housing and shops grouped around a marina. The dock itself does now accommodate a flotilla of private yachts together with one or two preserved historic ships and the Blue Funnel pleasure cruiser terminal. However, property developers' lifeless speculative flats and a mundane yacht club occupy two quays, the obviously cheap and rather unprepossessing shopping centre a third. The fourth, western, quay is occupied largely by parked cars. The former MGM - now Virgin - multiplex, as characterless an industrial shed as any of its ilk, is set back at the inland corner and a vast building festooned with telecommunications aerials of incomparable ugliness lies beyond the wasteland to the south.

Southampton City Council had wanted a new marine heritage museum on the west quay but was not able to fund it and a new B.F.I.-funded, two-screen R.F.T. was proposed instead. This unexpected but fortuitous substitution was how the Harbour Lights was born. The Council was the client and Burrell Foley Fischer were appointed architects. This was the practice's first complete new free-standing cinema building and so it presented a new set of problems, structural and aesthetic, as well as the opportunity to put into effect their complete range of ideas about cinema design.

At first glance Harbour Lights looks like a cinema. It cannot be mistaken for a yacht club or a restaurant or a shop, yet studied for longer it does not look like an Odeon or a Gaumont Palace or a Regal either. The elements of cinema that characterise it are distilled to the minimum of the glass stair tower evoking the form of a moderne Odeon outline. John Burrell's preliminary sketches show how thoroughly he had mastered the language of cinema design as there is barely any change between these and the finished building, something which Sir David Puttnam remarked upon at the opening.

Structurally, the problem was that foundations could only be established some way inland from the quayside - Burrell would have liked to have put the building right at the water's edge - and the budget dictated simplicity. The dismal surroundings offered no existing architectural forms or materials to relate to, so Burrell decided that the building should itself be a landmark, something sculptural to which future development around the dock might itself relate. There was no street, so the building had to create its own 'public realm' and, because of the need to make an essentially inward looking building - cinemas are the ultimate 'black boxes' - look outwards, the public space had to cross the boundary of the facade.

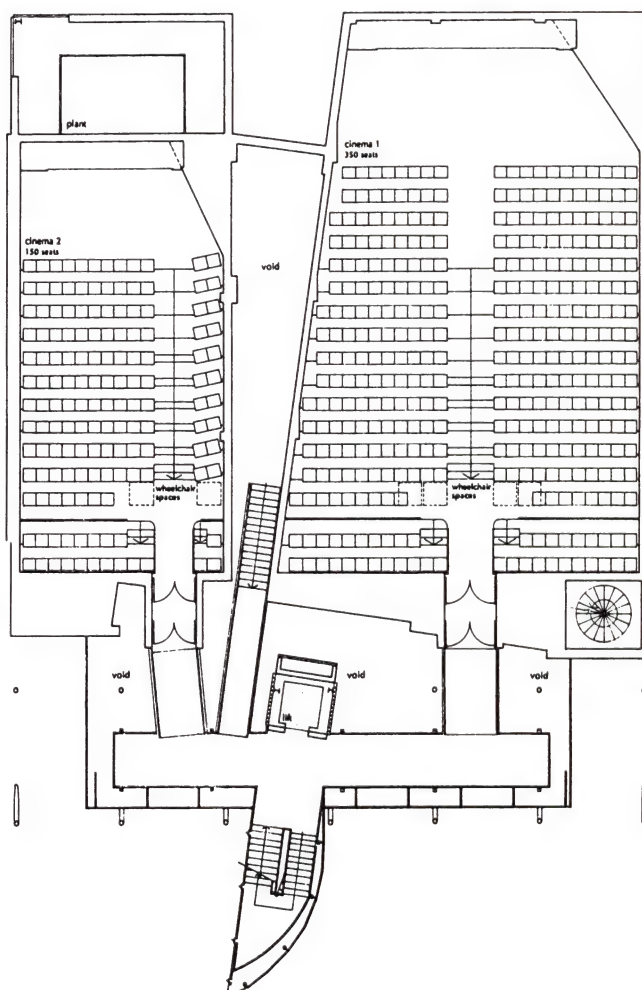
These constraints dictated a solution which Burrell



Plans of the Harbour Lights Cinema show the innovatory use of a separation between the screens to provide gallery space. The café is being inserted to the left of the stair tower, in front of the creche.

suggests was so logical that it almost designed itself. The load of the building is founded at the landward, screen end and the rake of the auditoria rises upwards towards the quayside where it is supported on outwardly leaning stays. The profiles of the auditoria naturally form the shape of a ship's hull which is emphasised with external wood cladding. Burrell explains that he deliberately restricted the marine references to that one idea. Portholes and funnels would have over-played the metaphor, another example of the practice's careful distillation of ideas and forms to the essential minimum needed to convey the intended message.

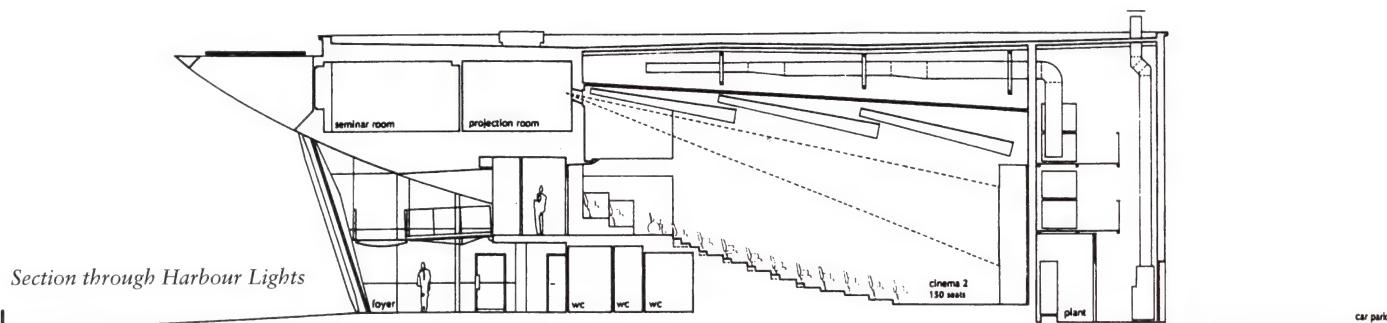
The auditoria sweep up to the leading edge of a prow or wing. Below it, a void is created into which a glass box has been inserted to accommodate the foyer on the ground floor and an access bridge to the auditoria on the first floor. Set into the prow of the building on the second floor are a conference room, the administrative offices and the projection box behind them. The levels are linked by a projecting stair tower, curved on the landward side, built of glass bricks and surmounted above the roof edge with a blue neon sign. The stair tower conveys the essence of a Thirties moderne sculpted facade. With the sign at its top, it both metaphorically and literally says 'cinema'.



The 'street' has been brought through the facade by placing a shallow ramp in front of the building which leads up to the front, dockside, doors. This can be used for small scale outdoor performance in the summer. The paybox lies straight ahead of the 'front' doors but is approached by most patrons from the side doors which face the car park and direction from which most come. A small concessions kiosk adjoins the paybox and both lie at the corner of a queuing and waiting area which flows around the stair and lift tower. The entrance area is simply decorated in pale blues, greys and varnished light wood. Exploring it, one is surprised to find that the foyer extends right back through the building between the two screens. It suddenly expands into an extraordinary, three storey high space with light pouring in from the top, soaring plain white walls and a polished timber floor. This is used as a commercial art gallery but also has a function in acoustically separating the auditoria.

ceiling panels accommodate tiny downlighters while a dim glow spills round from the void behind. These, too, are close to black. Scarlet seat covers add a dash of theatricality. Without them the auditorium could be the interior of a modern top-of-the-range saloon car writ large, but their flourish lifts it beyond the mundane.

The spacious second-floor projection box serves both screens. The conference room overlooking the dock from the south of the stair tower is used both for internal meetings and outside lettings. A back stair links the offices on the north of the stair tower with the kiosk two storeys below. At present, one of the eight large paintings on the theme of cinema commissioned for the building from Ron O'Donnell is displayed in the conference room and another on the private back stair. The remainder are stacked in a cupboard. It is ironical that the building has an art gallery but that because it is restricted to work for sale and much of the remaining public space is glass



The rear entrance from the car park is more than just an anonymous back door. It is signalled by an upwardly curving polished steel canopy squeezed between the thrusting masses of the auditoria. One enters a cave, only to find it lofty, brightly lit and scattered with prints and paintings. The physical expression of the separation between the auditoria represents a break from the conventional model of the vast brick or tin shed, which Burrell engagingly likens to a tortoise shell, containing an unknown number of separate screens.

The waterside front of the building is transparent. Light floods into it by day and out from it at night to be reflected in the water in the dock. The building has a powerful night presence enhanced by the blue neon signs. This is another of the vital characteristics of cinema architecture, established in the Thirties by Rudolph Frankel, the great exponent of 'night architecture', which Burrell Foley Fischer has distilled out of the classic tradition.

However, the transparency of the facade presents problems as well as theatrical bravura. Temperature control in the foyer has proven difficult and because the access to the auditoria is directly from a bridge that crosses the building behind the glass at first floor level, there is no transitional zone between the daytime brightness outside and the darkness inside. Emerging from a summer matinee show can be a dazzling experience.

The auditoria themselves, seating 150 and 350, are quietly elegant. The characteristic steep rakes, large screens, floating ceilings and horizontally banded walls in muted colours are all there. Almost black bands of acoustically absorbent panels stand out from the slightly paler charcoal grey of the walls. As at the Riverside, the floating

walled and not readily adaptable for display, the work commissioned for the building languishes hidden.

The use of foyer space to open up the buildings and provide "public realm", social spaces for meeting before or after a film, lies at the heart of Burrell Foley Fischer's cinema design philosophy. They see cinemas as public spaces, open all day and providing a facility for viewing exhibitions, chatting over coffee and whiling away time sociably, but it is in this respect that Harbour Lights significantly fails – the Council's budgetary constraints meant that the cafe bar was cut from the architects' proposed scheme. Although the art gallery is there, the essential cafe element is missing and the foyer is consequently lifeless. It opens an hour before the first show and early arriving patrons seem rather at a loss. The cost-saving abandonment of the cafe bar was recognised as a mistake by the operator, the Southampton Film Company, from the outset and is being rectified. Burrell Foley Fischer have been commissioned to add one, and the extension is due to have been completed by now.

Burrell explained that it is difficult to make an addition to a building designed as a piece and clearly regrets the client's decision to ignore the architects' advice and cut the cafe from the original brief. The footprint of the new cafe extends outwards from the soaring glass facade to the south of the stair tower, furthest from the inland, main approach side. It is to be a transparent structure with a very thin roof echoing the overall design. Fischer is confident that it will float harmoniously beneath the existing prow but there is a danger that it will be detrimental to the balance of the building, breaking the rhythm of the facade.

The foyer was the major new element in the practice's next cinema commission, the conversion of a former bus garage in Exeter into a twin for City Screen. The auditoria of the Exeter Picture House are placed back to back in the original building with a common central projection box, and a new extension has been added to fulfil the dual role of establishing the cinema's street presence and accommodating the all important public space.

The dramatic picture frame of the new addition's front facade stands slightly proud of the flanking walls, separated from them by narrow strips of glass, and is reminiscent both of a proscenium surround and of the tall arched facades of early Edwardian picture houses. The lights of the cafe shine out at night, emphasising the proscenium metaphor – the action on the screen is paralleled by the action in the cinema foyer.

The auditorium block cuts into a hillside and the cafe bar is accessible directly from the street to the rear and overlooks the paybox foyer accessed on the level from the street at the front. A curved wall splits the lower space and forms the side wall to the staircase leading up to the brightly lit bar. By this device, patrons entering at the front are encouraged upstairs and on returning downstairs for the film are led through a gradation of colours, from white to terra-cotta to blue grey. The passageway into the heart of the building eases the transition from light to dark.

The auditoria seat 225 and 158 and depart slightly from the established Burrell Foley Fischer style. In the larger hall the projection box overhangs the rear, stepped, tier of seating; unusually for the practice the main seating block is on a shallow rake though without sacrificing any clarity of sightlines to the large screen set high on the end wall. The side walls and ceilings in both are designed as series of articulated shells with lighting recesses in the overlaps. The colour scheme is predominantly dark blue.

Burrell Foley Fischer's link with City Screen has been strengthened by their collaboration over a spectacular new four screen cinema at Stratford, east London. The practice's second free-standing cinema building has been built with City Challenge funding and will be operated by City Screen when it opens in August 1997. Burrell explains that the Stratford Picture House will be clearly a blood relation of Harbour Lights. It shares many of the Southampton cinema's characteristics and incorporates the Burrell Foley Fischer hallmarks such as the expression of the auditoria as separate spaces divided by narrow cleavages of foyer with gallery and cafe areas clearly visible from the street behind a transparent facade and lit to provide a powerful night-time presence in the townscape.

The most spectacular external feature will be a 26 metre high, outwardly tapering tower topped with a 'crow's nest' and mast, supporting a 'Las Vegas style' neon readograph sign at its base. This will advertise the cinema to passers by on the town centre ring road; traffic lights (pre-existing, not new!) sited right beside it will ensure maximum visibility to motorists.

The four screens will seat a total of 800 people and will be served by a single projection box running the length of the building and expressed externally as a spine pulling the whole composition together. The auditoria will be rendered externally in brilliant white with matt natural

steel roofs. The projecting foyer wall behind the free-standing tower will be mint green.

The cinema has presented the architects with a much relished exercise in designing a new public space. It adjoins at right angles the historic Theatre Royal, long marooned on the edge of town outside the covered market and mall. The practice has designed a square in front of the buildings to be lit with fibre optics beneath the pavement. A new arts centre, planned for the corner site between the cinema and theatre, will be visible from the square through the cut off corner of the cinema's glass foyer box, framed by its projecting roof and colonade.

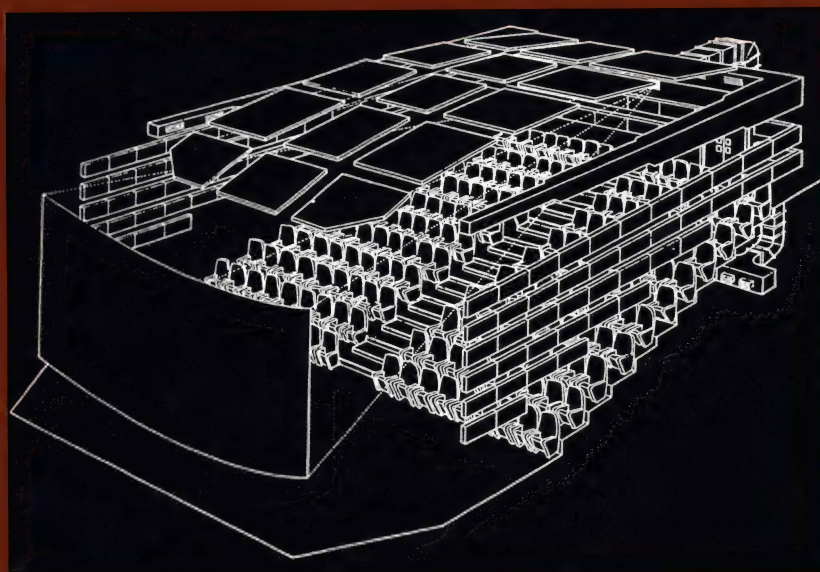
Burrell Foley Fischer are not designing the entire internal fit-out at Stratford. Other designers will contribute the concessions stands. Burrell feels that the architect's job is to provide a skeleton and that the architectural bones of this building are sufficiently strong that the insertions will slot in, like shopfronts on a traditional high street.

While Stratford represents a turn from art house towards the mainstream – it will be programmed as a 'mini-multiplex' – Burrell Foley Fischer have not become separated from their fringe arts roots. The new London Film Makers' Co-Operative in Hoxton Square, to the east of the City of London in Shoreditch, was due to open in spring 1997, though it is not to be formally launched until September.

This is rather a different project from the other cinema work in that the main auditorium is flat floored and intended for mixed media use, as dance and other live performance is often combined with film at L.F.M.C. shows. The hall can be naturally lit and its reverberation time can be varied by adjusting hinged panels, acoustically absorbent on one side and reflective on the other, which double up as blackouts along the fenestrated wall. The foyer doubles as a second, informal auditorium, separated from the formal hall by the kiosk and projection box. Film will be projected onto frosted glass screens over the kiosk and in the floor, visible from the street outside. Fischer comments that, although this building differs rather from the more conventional work, it should successfully evoke the same feelings as the other cinemas that the practice has worked on.

What of the future? Burrell has an unbuilt scheme developed originally for the R.I.B.A.'s Vision for Vauxhall exhibition in 1994. The exhibition sought to promote ideas for the development of the vast derelict Thames-side site at the southwestern end of Vauxhall Bridge. Burrell conceived an underground cinema comprising six fan-shaped auditoria coiling like a snail shell around a foyer. The street presence would be provided by a ten storey tower with a vertical sign and, spectacularly, by an arrangement for projecting images onto the facades of the office buildings around the plaza above the cinema. Outdoor cinema on summer nights would be possible. Burrell points out that cinemas nowadays are often seen as adjuncts to mixed use developments and that this concept will be ready the next time a client wants to add an invisible cinema to an urban office scheme.

In the meantime, the practice is at work on several long term projects of more certain realisation. Their rapidly developing relationship with City Screen presently involves developing a brand image for the circuit. They



(Above left) The Metro foyer occupies the width of a small shop front but conveys its cinema identity through the application of moderne touches set against raw blockwork.

(Above) The Riverside auditorium established the architects' style with its steep rake and large screen. The elements of the auditorium are seen clearly in a schematic drawing (left).

(Bottom left) The most unexpected feature of the Harbour Lights cinema is the gallery separating the two auditoria. The foyer and dockside lie beyond the stairs to the entrance level. The cinema's raked form arose from structural constraint but combines functionality with appropriateness of form (below).





(Left) A model of the Stratford Picture House presently under construction indicates how dramatic the 26 metre tower will be.

(Below) The proscenium arch front of the Exeter Picture House frames the activity in the foyer and cafe bar and in the foyer – a curved wall and wide stair lead people up to the cafe bar having booked their seats.

(Bottom left) Luxury car? The larger auditorium at Harbour Lights is lifted by the splash of scarlet seat covers.



All photographs by courtesy of Burrell Foley Fischer: photographers Joe Low and Dennis Gilbert



are advising the Rio Cinema in Dalston on an application for lottery funded improvements. On a larger scale, Burrell Foley Fischer have been commissioned by the B.F.I. to carry out the feasibility study for a new National Film Theatre in the West End. To date this has involved site research. If a new development is finally chosen rather than the take-over of an existing building, Burrell Foley Fischer should have an opportunity to build a genuine national cinematic landmark.

So, to sum up their quiet revolution, what have Burrell Foley Fischer done with cinema design? They have certainly breathed new life into the form at the time of a resurgence in cinema going. Compare the Stratford Picture House or Harbour Lights with a pre-war Odeon and you see two rather different but unmistakably related buildings. Burrell Foley Fischer have distilled the characteristics of the latter and applied them sparingly to advertise the new kind of cinema where the foyer is the heart, a transparent and vibrant public space functioning as a social meeting place rather than just as a waiting and queuing area. It might incorporate an art gallery or performance space and it will certainly have a cafe/bar. The auditoria will lie off it like chapels, expressed externally as distinct spaces. They will be comfortable and understated rather than austere. They will have steeply raked seating looking forward to huge screens and, however small, will have a big, cinematic 'feel'. The cinema will advertise itself with a simple but bold facade which will be substantially transparent to entice patrons into its foyer cafe, radiating light at night. The finishes will emphasise the quality of the materials and thought behind their sparing use although Burrell Foley Fischer's buildings look more expensive than they actually are.

In the past, cinemas were often shunned by architectural critics as not 'real architecture'. Bearing in mind the acclaim for Harbour Lights in the serious architectural press, have Burrell Foley Fischer made cinema design respectable? Burrell is reluctant to make any claim. "Nothing has been done for so long", he answers, though he does think that critics have a problem with populist buildings. Although the practice's roots are in the arts – "the thing is, the practice is not doing superstores and sheds", Fischer remarks – she and Burrell are anxious to emphasise that they do not have a mission. Fischer observes that the practice has approached cinema design from its background in the arts and its interest in public space. These have instilled completely different ideas and values compared with those informing the designers of commercial and retail facilities. The practice is highly disciplined in budgetary constraints. Both Harbour Lights and Stratford Picture House will have been built at a cost of around £600,000 per screen which compares very favourably with the average spend of £6 to £7 million for new multiplex cinemas by the major national operators. One feels that, if they were asked, Burrell Foley Fischer could turn out a thrilling mainstream multiplex on a fairly conventional budget.

Burrell is aware that the practice might be regarded as 'arty' but he does see cinema as a populist medium and recognises the need to make buildings that appeal to their audiences. He feels there is an opportunity in cinema design "to loosen up a bit" and have fun: "It is the element of joy about it that is nice."

BURRELL FOLEY FISCHER CINEMA PROJECTS 1983-97

Client and lead partner are identified in brackets –
JB=John Burrell, SF=Stefanie Fischer, MF=Mark Foley:

1983-1985 plus various refurbishments to date

Metro Cinema, Rupert Street, London W1 (The Other Cinema)
Complete fit out of new twin screen cinema. (JB/SF)

1986

Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Square, London WC1 (Artificial Eye)

Refurbishment and redesign of exterior and foyer (MF/SF)

Lumiere Cinema, St Martin's Lane, London W1 (Artificial Eye)
Long term programme of improvements (MF/SF)

Chelsea Cinema, King's Road, London SW3 (Artificial Eye)
Interior design (MF)

1986-1987

Riverside Studios, Hammersmith, London
New cinema, cafe and studio (SF/MF)

1990

Broadway Media Centre, Nottingham
Refurbishment of existing cinema, addition of second cinema and other facilities (SF)

Queens Film Theatre, Belfast (BFI)
Initial appraisal for comprehensive redesign to upgrade to Regional Film Theatre standard – unbuilt (SF)

Tyneside Film Theatre, Newcastle (BFI)
Improvements to second screen and access, addition of extra facilities – unbuilt (SF)

1994

'A Vision for Vauxhall'
6 screen multiplex cinema underground – unbuilt (JB)

1995

Harbour Lights Cinema, Ocean Village, Southampton (Southampton City Council)
New free-standing twin screen cinema (JB)

Phoenix Picture House, Oxford (City Screen)
New cafe/bar (fit-out by others) (SF)

ICA Cinema and Cinematheque, The Mall, London SW1 (Institute of Contemporary Arts, London)
Refurbishment (SF)

1996

Exeter Picture House (City Screen)
New twin screens in warehouse conversion, new extension block accommodating foyer, cafe and bar (SF)

1996-7

National Film Theatre in the West End (BFI)
Feasibility study and site research (JB/SF)

1997

Stratford Picture House, Stratford, London E15 (Stratford City Challenge / City Screen)
New free-standing four screen multiplex (JB)

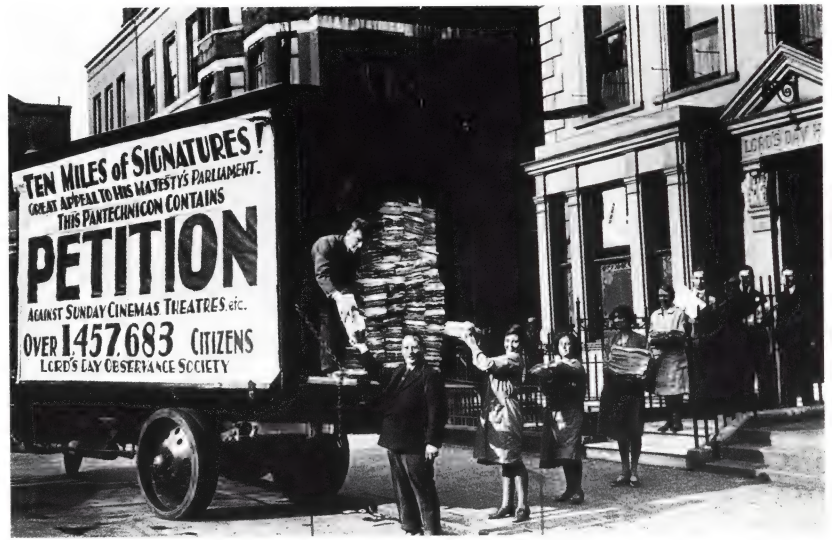
London Film Makers' Co-operative, Hoxton Square, London N1 (LFMC)
New facility, multipurpose auditorium and foyer exhibition space (SF)

Rio Cinema, Dalston, London (Rio Cinema)
Advice on lottery-funded improvements (SF)

Pictures

from *The Daily Herald* Archive

Arranged and
Introduced by
COLIN HARDING



MANY MEMBERS of the CTA will remember the *Daily Herald* newspaper. Launched in 1911 as a news sheet of the London printing unions who were striking for a 48 hour working week, the *Daily Herald* was to eventually become one of Britain's most popular daily papers. During the Twenties, the *Herald* was owned jointly by the TUC and the Labour Party and became established as the voice of the Socialist movement, dealing with issues directly relevant to the working man and woman. Political integrity, however, was no guarantee of financial credibility. The paper reeled from one financial crisis to another and was in constant danger of collapse.

In 1929, Odhams Press stepped in to save the *Herald*. A deal was agreed with the TUC whereby they retained ownership of 49% of the shares and Odhams bought out the remaining 51%. The new owners saw the paper as a viable commercial investment and set about improving the paper's fortunes. Ramsay MacDonald activated the presses to print the first copies of a new and totally restyled *Daily Herald*. The immediate priorities for the publishers were to maintain the paper's socialist profile but, at the same time, to increase its circulation and ensure its financial stability. A massive promotional drive set out to achieve these aims. The size of the paper was doubled, from ten to twenty pages; rallies and events promoting the new *Herald* were held all over the country, with speakers such as Ernest Bevin; members of the Labour Party were recruited to solicit new readers and free gifts such as cameras and fountain pens were given away on purchase of the paper. The result was an immediate and massive rise in the paper's circulation from 250,000 copies to over one million. This trend continued until, in 1933, the *Herald* became the world's top selling popular daily newspaper with daily sales of over two million copies.

The success of the *Herald* spurred its rivals into action. One of the fiercest circulation wars Britain had yet known broke out. The *Herald's* success was short-lived and it was soon overtaken by its main rival, the *Daily Express*, owned by Beaverbrook.

Throughout this period, and for many years afterwards, the *Herald* consistently supported official Labour Party policies as defined by the party manifesto and the TUC conferences. Odhams Press, however, had a commercial remit to produce a popular mass-selling daily. These two aims did not always coincide and the Odhams-TUC relationship became increasingly uneasy. Nevertheless, it managed to last for thirty years until finally, in 1960, faced with a decline in sales and a consequent loss in advertising revenue, Odhams persuaded the TUC to relinquish their shares.

(Previous page, top right) March 1932: The Lord's Day Observance Society outside its London headquarters loading petitions against the Sunday opening of cinemas. (Bottom) November 1932: The Sunday Films Association campaigning for Sunday screenings in Croydon, Surrey. The result of the ballot was an overwhelming vote in favour. And the campaign in Acton, West London, for Sunday cinema opening in 1933.

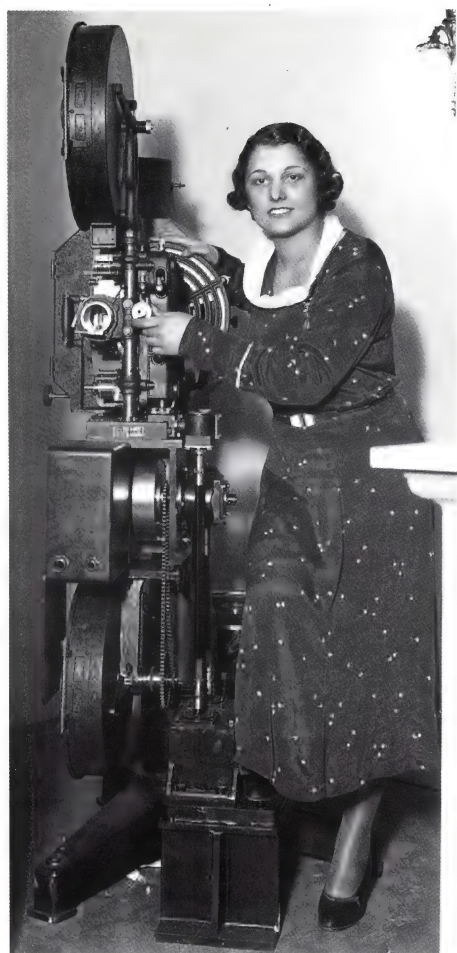
The Sixties were to witness the demise of the *Herald*. In 1961 it was taken over by Mirror Group Newspapers when they bought the Odhams empire and the ailing paper was given a new lease of life. Supported by a massive publicity drive, in September 1964 it was relaunched as the *Sun*. After an initial upsurge in circulation, sales again declined. Mirror Group decided to cut their losses and, in 1969, sold the *Sun* to News International, owned by Rupert Murdoch, whereupon its content, message and style were completely altered.

Whilst the paper is, sadly, no longer with us, the photographic library of the *Daily Herald* now forms part of the Collection of the National Museum of Photography, Film & Television. Comprising approximately three million photographs and over 100,000 glass negatives, the archive is broadly split into three categories: places, events and people. It provides us with a fascinating pictorial record of local, national and international events and personalities spanning the fifty year period from the Twenties to the Sixties. It is particularly rich in its coverage of the Thirties. Major events such as the Spanish Civil War, the rise of fascism, the abdication crisis, the unemployment marches are all photographed, as are important personalities such as Hitler and Churchill. Indeed, all subjects deemed to be 'newsworthy' enough to appear in the paper are represented in the archive. As well as politics, a huge range of other topics, such as the Monarchy, sport, science and industry and the arts and entertainment, are recorded.

The importance of the Cinema during this period is reflected in its coverage in the archive. Photographs of interest to film historians can be found in a range in subject categories. Personalities include, of course, many famous film stars but the files also contain portraits of other film-related individuals such as directors and producers as well as entrepreneurs such as Oscar Deutsch. There are publicity stills from many films and also behind-the-scenes photographs showing filming in the studio and on location. Photographs of cinema exteriors, interiors, audiences and staff can all be found. It is from this range of material that I have selected a number of photographs to illustrate the great wealth of images contained in the archive. For this selection I have concentrated on the Thirties – the period when the *Herald* enjoyed its greatest success and when cinema was experiencing its 'Golden Age'.

The Museum welcomes researchers who wish to view material from its Collection and is pleased to assist with general enquiries. Access to the Daily Herald Archive is by appointment only. Contact The Duty Enquiry Officer, The National Museum of Photography, Film & Television, Pictureville, Bradford, West Yorkshire, BD1 1NQ.. Tel: 01274 727488 ext. 242, between 2pm and 4pm, Tuesday to Friday. Fax 01274 723155.

The National Museum of Photography, Film & Television is a part of the National Museum of Science and Industry. All enquiries regarding the reproduction of photographs from the Daily Herald Archive should be addressed to: The Science and Society Picture Library, The Science Museum, Exhibition Road, London, SW7 2DD. Tel: 0171 938 9751.



May 1932: a new Ross sound projector on show at the Cinematograph Trade Exhibition held at Grosvenor House.



(Below) Mrs. Stanley Baldwin inspects a model of the Duchess cinema, Commercial Road, Stepney, London, at the Exhibition. This became the Troxy and seen above at its opening on 11 September 1933 are two of the promoters – the Hyams brothers, Phil (left) and Sid (right), with the manager [or business partner Major Gale?] and Miss Bridget Hughes.





August 1932: usherettes at the Leicester Square Theatre, London.

May 1934: the Trocadero cinema, Elephant and Castle, South London. On 17 May, this was the venue chosen for Gracie Fields to present a cheque to the winner of the Daily Herald radio star competition, who lived in nearby Camberwell.



22 June 1933: the vestibule of the New Victoria cinema, London, prior to showing The Life of the Prince of Wales.

1934: the Palace, Bow Road, London. In August, the Palace made national headlines when its manager, Dudley Hoard, was murdered during a robbery. Thieves attacked Mr Hoard and his wife before making off with the weekend takings of £100. Mr Hoard died after being taken to hospital.





August 1934: the Leicester Square Theatre.



May 1935: the lobby of the Carlton Haymarket, London. As a publicity stunt, a free matinee of *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* was arranged for women wearing a Bengal lancer hat.

August 1934: a corner of the entrance hall at the London Pavilion, Piccadilly Circus, shortly before re-opening in September 1934 to become United Artists' showcase West End cinema. It had closed in April for a complete refurbishment.

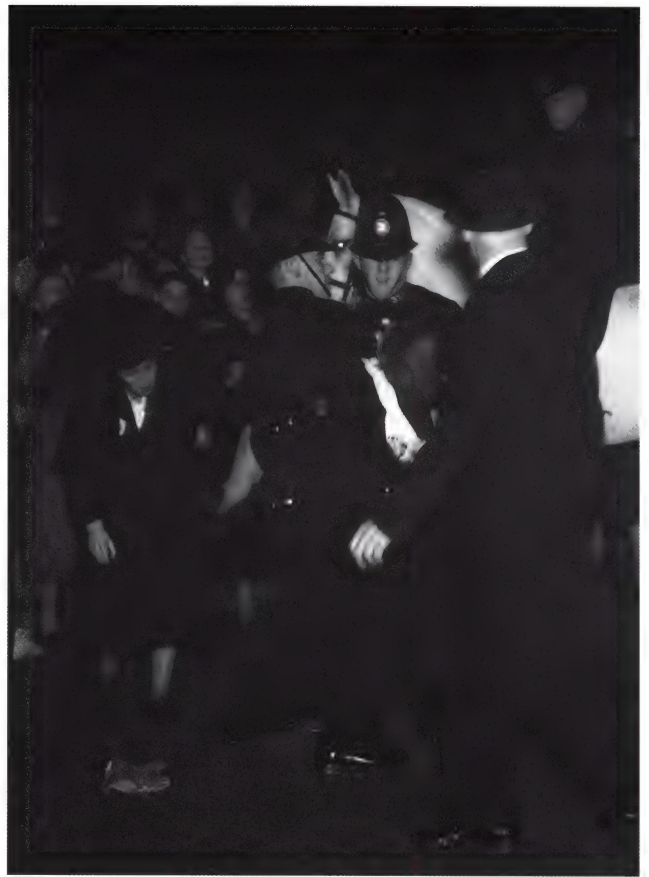


12 February 1936: police hold back the crowds at the premiere of Charles Chaplin's *Modern Times* at the Tivoli cinema, Strand, London.





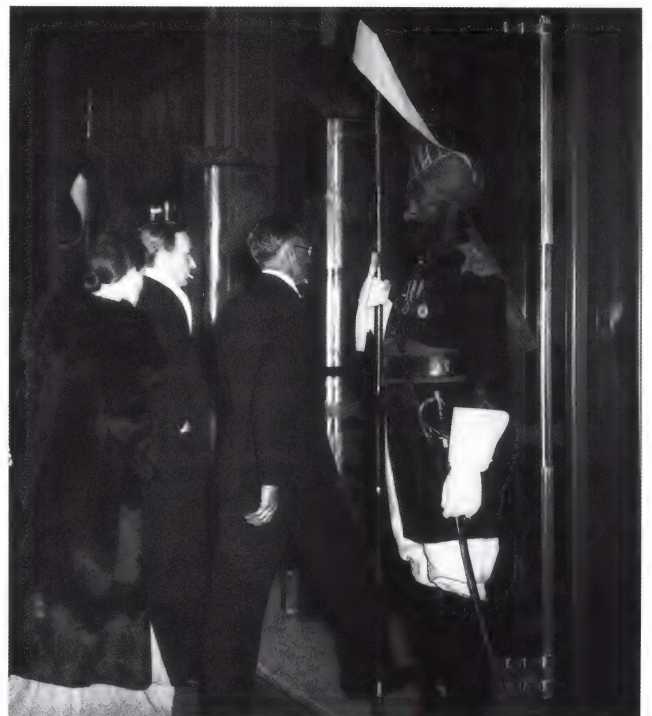
October 1936: the closed Alhambra Theatre in Leicester Square, shortly before demolition to make way for the Odeon.



2 November 1937: police come to the aid of a young woman who has fainted in the crush at the opening of the Odeon Leicester Square.



September 1937: the Odeon Leicester Square during construction.



April 1938: an Indian guard of honour awaits guests at the main entrance of the Odeon Leicester Square for the premiere of Alexander Korda's production, The Drum.



DAVID NYE

Cinema Architect

By RICHARD GRAY

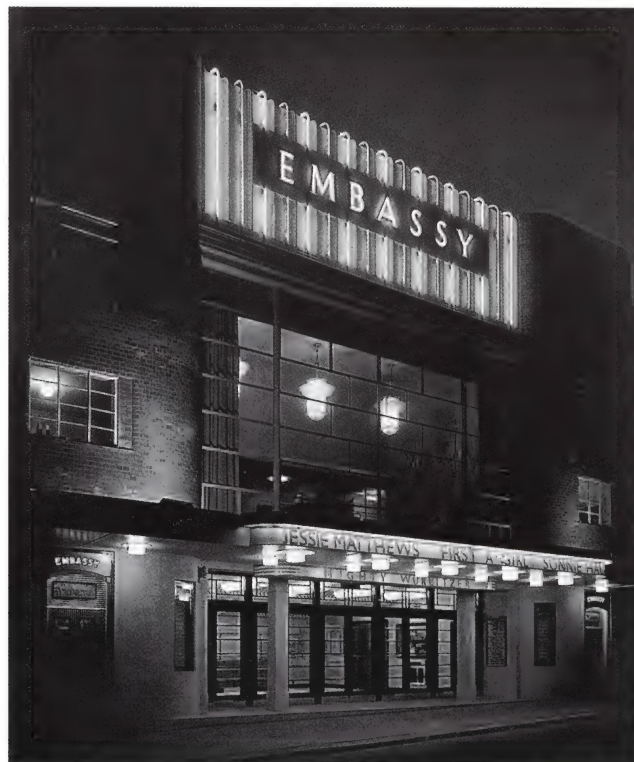


IT IS NOW over twelve years since Allen Eyles and myself travelled down to Bramley, a village on the further side of Guildford, in pursuit of pearls of wisdom from the lips of a real living designer of cinemas from the 'great days' – personally acquainted with those fabled god-like names... Bernstein, Cromie, Komisarjevsky and the rest. We were excited at the prospect of meeting David Nye but the quarry was surprised and faintly mystified, for no-one had shown the slightest interest in his cinemas since the day they were finished. Over tea in that Surrey sitting room I expressed an opinion on the Embassy, Peterborough. Its author gazed out through the leaded panes and, after a pause, announced, "I've never heard a comment on it since it was built." For me the half century in between vanished but for pragmatic and practical Nye there seemed little satisfaction in these buildings; for him they did not deserve plaudits or merit an afternoon of intensive interview. At the outset of his career, during the Depression years of the early Thirties, Nye was determined to be successful, as is revealed in the story of how he obtained his first cinema commission. Much of Nye's discourse was taken up with cost saving factors in cinema construction, for this endeared him to miserly exhibitors who wished to put up grandiose cinemas on a shoe-string and therefore kept his practice in work. Eventually the façade of hard-nosed economics softened and when describing his cinema in Sevenoaks he pleaded that the façade "wasn't too bad". This article includes information gleaned from Nye's reminiscences during the interview and also from files preserved by his personal secretary for many years, Margaret Horder.

David Evelyn Nye was born on 4 August 1906. At the age of twenty he became articled to T. F. W. Grant, FRIBA and in 1930 he was awarded the first research scholarship under the auspices of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. In the following year he moved on to W. Palmer Jones FRIBA and subsequently to Lionel Upperton Grace and W. G. Farmer in the City of London, Martin Travers* and a building firm in Essex (in order to gain practical experience). Nye became an associate of the Incorporated Association of Architects and Surveyors in 1931 and set up a private practice at 57 The Oval in the East End of London in the following year, moving in 1933 to 54 Tufton Street, Westminster. In 1934 Nye took on his first assistant and became honorary architect to Essex Rural Community Council, which may account for the location of his first cinema commission, at Maldon in that county (although the Cinema Sevenoaks, planned slightly later, went up more speedily and opened four months earlier). Nye recalled apprehension on the part of his clients at Maldon, Shipman and King Cinemas Ltd.,† on employing an architect who had

*Howard Martin Otho Travers (1886–1948) – designer of church furnishings and stained glass.

†Alfred Shipman (1890–1966) and Samuel King (1890–1973) met in the orchestra pit of a cinema before the First World War. Shipman was a full-time musician, whereas King taught in a school during the daytime and accompanied films only in the evenings. Directly after the war they formed a partnership to run cinemas. Shipman, a Russian immigrant, also became King's brother-in-law as he married his partner's sister. The Kings, originally from Poland but of German extraction, had anglicised their surname from Koenig.



The first Shipman and King cinema was a converted barn in Hailsham, East Sussex, but by 1921 they were able to commission a purpose-built cinema, the Pavilion, in the same town. Their great era of expansion was during the Thirties when they established a circuit of medium scale cinemas (1,000–1,200 seats) in middle-class communities in the South of England, preferring this territory to the more populous inner cities and 19th century artisan suburbs where most cinema development became concentrated. Because of their location, all their cinemas included a balcony, for despite being built to a tight budget, the partners knew their audiences would be prepared to pay the expensive seat prices that a balcony could command. David Nye designed seven cinemas for the circuit. They also regularly used other architects such as H. W. Coussens and Howis and Belcham, with single contributions from other practices, most notably Robert Cromie and the firm of Leslie Kemp and Frederick Tasker. The circuit was acquired by the Grade Organisation in 1965 and later absorbed by EMI. What remained after closures passed to Cannon and thus to the re-incarnated ABC company formed last year.

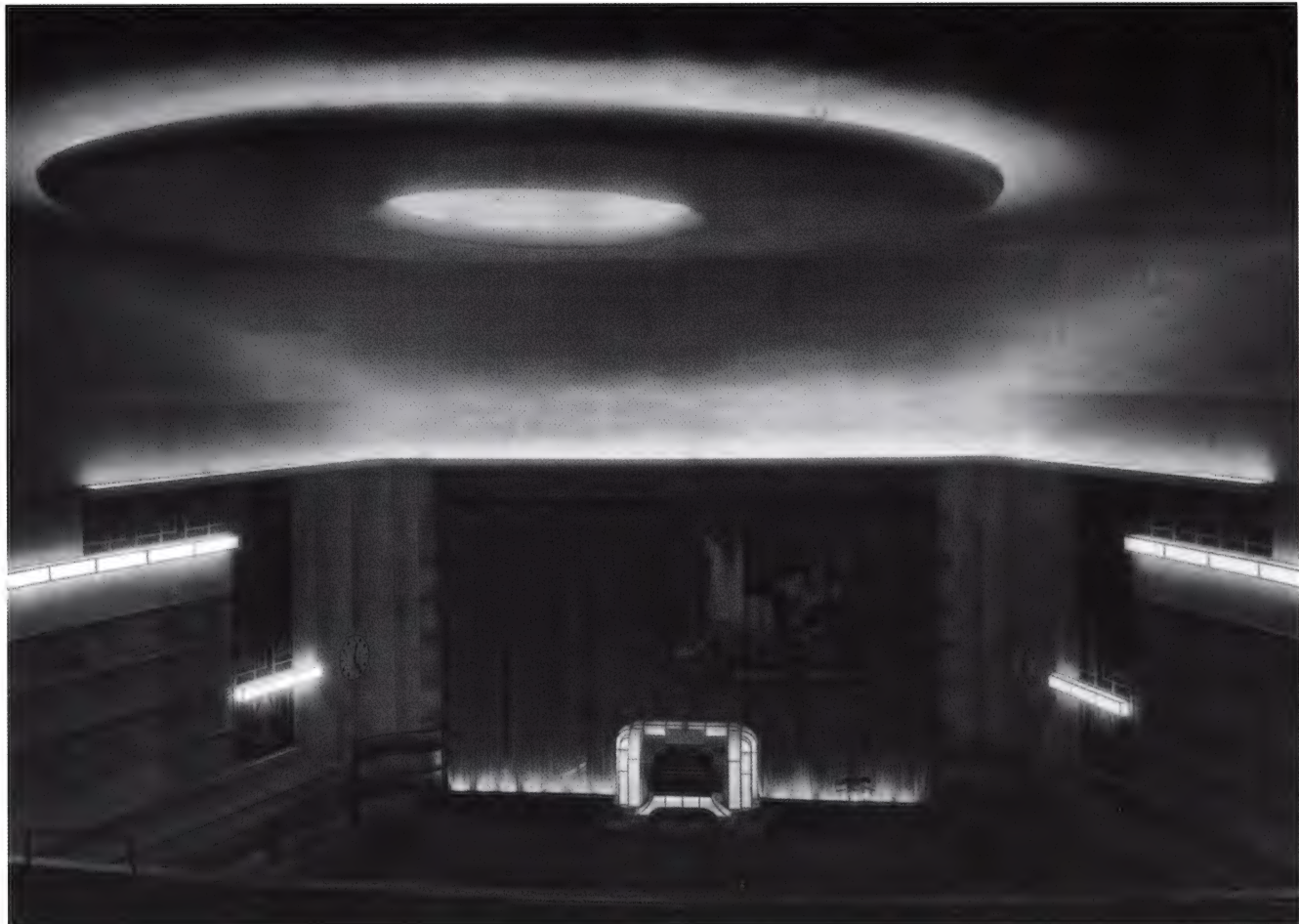


(P41) Auditorium, Embassy Fareham and David Evelyn Nye, aged 29, in 1935. (Opposite and above) Embassy Maldon.

never before designed a cinema and recollected the complex circumstances of how he landed the job. He designed a new home for a Mr. Baker in Maldon, who, when he sold his old property to Shipman and King for redevelopment (which was presumably in a commercially prominent position), agreed to Nye's prompting that he should "tie his name to the site". Hence the exhibitors' nervousness at being forced to employ a young architect inexperienced in the art of designing cinemas. They may have been concerned about his ability to deal with the technicalities of auditorium construction, such as obtaining optimum sight-lines. In fact Nye took great pains with this problem, then and in the future setting up a half-inch scale section to work out the calculations – his draughtsmen had special enlarged drawing boards with T squares seven feet long for the purpose. The architect recalled a conversation with Robert Cromie, who had greater experience in cinema design, in which he expressed amazement that Nye had never made a mistake with this intricate element of auditorium planning. In the mid-1930s Nye's architectural training was incomplete. This state of affairs was not uncommon in the Thirties and several instances can be cited among architects of cinemas – Nye became a 'licentiate' of the RIBA in 1938.

The Embassy Maldon opened on 19 March 1936 as a

sister to Shipman and King's other cinema in the town, the Hippodrome. Nye's façade for the Embassy was brick-built to harmonise with the locality. A large central window was placed above the entrance and given a streamlined appearance by emphasising the transoms. Higher up, a large panel accommodated the name of the cinema outlined out in neon tubing and surrounded by more neon designed as a series of verticals which added to the effect at night. The flanking brick sections accommodated the stair towers – a standard plan for foyer blocks derived from Leathart and Granger's Kensington Kinema (now Odeon) of 1926. With the roof hidden by a parapet, the angularity of the composition was reduced by rounding the corners. Decoration in the 1,250 seat auditorium relied on horizontal bands of fibrous plaster leaves and chevrons illuminated from coving. These also served to disguise the ventilation extracts and the organ chamber tone chute. This work is credited to Mollo and Egan who are advertised in the opening brochure as 'architectural decorators'. This firm, established by Eugene Mollo (like Alfred Shipman a Russian immigrant) and Michael Egan, a French-Canadian, worked in many cinemas during the Thirties and extensively for Shipman and King. In their working relationship with Nye, they would supply designs from which his practice would prepare working drawings adapted for the surface available. The same plaster motifs were used for the brilliantly jazzy café above the foyer. Mollo and Egan would also have designed the painted decoration above the



(Above) Cinema Sevenoaks.

(Opposite above) Embassy Chesham.

(Opposite below) facade and auditorium of Embassy Esher.

servery but Nye specified the incredible clashing Zulu mask carpet, rather surprisingly supplied by the contract department of Hamptons, an old-established furnishing emporium which once stood adjacent to the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square. The chromium-plated tubular steel chairs and tables with the ultra-jazzy seat covers were supplied by Metal Furniture Works Ltd. of Stratford-on-Avon and the suspended light fittings came

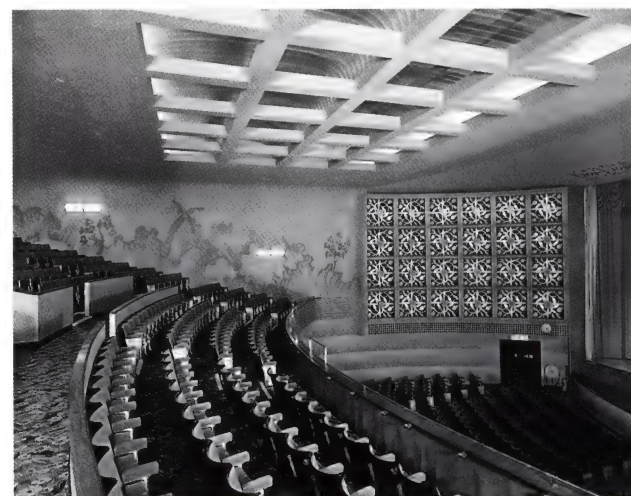
from a well-known name of the time, F. H. Pride of Clapham, South London, who probably also supplied the glass organ console surround. The Embassy cafe had one of the most spectacular art-deco interiors of the Thirties – what a pleasure it must have been to sip tea and munch toasted tea cakes here, for who needed alcohol in such an intoxicating setting? Like the cinema, the cafe has long since gone and is a great loss. Maldon had the only Wurlitzer organ installed by Shipman and King; they were more expensive than the English Christie instruments usually favoured by the company. Leslie James, a famous exponent of the organ, played for the opening performance but the cost of retaining his services in Maldon must have been too great as after a week a

lesser name took over, George Senior. The whole enterprise took under six months to erect and equip. For the opening, Shipman and King laid on (to use contemporary slang) a 'topping' film, *Top Hat*.

Nye's second film theatre commission, for the Sevenoaks Cinema Company, was the appropriately named 'Cinema' in Sevenoaks, Kent, opened by Lord Sackville (of the nearby mansion of Knole) on 4 November 1935, being a reconstruction of a picture house of the same name, itself a rebuilding dating from only ten years previously. The brick façade of spare simplicity was treated as a symmetrical composition relieved by a wide central window which lit a café on the first floor. Further up on the frontage, a stone frieze carried the word Cinema (outlined in neon after dark), flanked by low relief panels designed as variations on the masks of comedy and tragedy. The attic storey return walls and windows had rounded angles. A superbly lit photograph of the upper foyer reveals an interior of restrained propriety, with decorative interest provided by metal balustrades on the stair wells and a glazed screen dividing off the café, while diffused light is directed from one side against a plaster ceiling devoid of mouldings. The style of photography emphasises continental elegance and a refined taste which may even have pleased Morton Shand. In the streamlined auditorium, horizontals drew the eye screenwards in the Mendelsohnian manner with a plaster firmament illuminated by concealed installations above the proscenium and a 'flying saucer' providing a central halo of light. An abstract pattern applied on the stage drapes and a glass organ console completed the effects. In contrast to his work for Shipman and King and other clients where the interior was the work of decoration consultants, Nye designed the entire scheme at Sevenoaks himself. The cinema cost some £10,000 and provided 1,150 seats, representing excellent value even for 1935. Nye's reconstruction of this cinema also appears to have been completed in barely six months. It is regrettable that this cinema does not survive as it represented an undiluted example of Nye's design powers in the genre.

The opening programmes for Shipman and King cinemas included a list of their circuit to date. The brochure for the Embassy Maldon mentions Nye's next work for the company, the identically named cinema in Petts Wood, Kent, as being 'in course of construction'. Obviously the company's qualms about his capabilities must have been dispelled. The cinema opened on 12 October 1936 in typical Shipman and King territory – a burgeoning London suburb built around a recently opened railway station. The Embassy façade had a closer affinity with the independent Sevenoaks cinema that with its predecessor at Maldon. The first floor café windows included a similar vertical stress and were capped with an identical undulating moulding. However, the front was treated as a single block form with the rounded return corners extending to the full height of the building: bland but quite effective. Internally, things followed the Maldon pattern but without the ravishing treatment of the café.

Two further schemes for Shipman and King opened during the following year – both again named Embassy – at Chesham on 11 January and at Esher on 23



August (the latter performed by the novelist Ruby M. Ayres, with an address by the actress Frances Day). As at Maldon, the Embassy at Chesham supplemented an existing Shipman and King cinema, the Astoria. Here in a somewhat remote commuter-ville, the local planning authority do not appear to have imposed restrictions on the style of the façade, as Nye combined sober brick facing with the stark world of white International Modernism, albeit enlivened by art deco streamlining. The composition incorporated shops at ground level with two storeys of flats above, while over the cinema entrance a large window with radius corners lit a small café. To one side a vertical sign in red and green neon displaying the name of the cinema attracted attention in the street. Cement rendering was not only cheaper than good quality facing bricks but it also created a bright modern style suitable for cinemas – an aesthetic made fashionable by the architects working for the Odeon circuit. Wherever possible, cinema exteriors needed to advertise themselves and be noticeable; their dissimilarity from other buildings emphasised what they were about – luxury and ephemeral entertainment – in contrast to the solid permanence of the suburban house, which could be passed on to future generations, outlasting architectural fads.

In the auditorium, the decoration provided by Mollo and Egan for the ante-proscenium walls broke with their previous lineal solution to form a pattern based on ceiling coffering – light bulbs concealed in the centre of each square ‘coffer’ illuminated fibrous plaster foliage, the latter disguising the ventilation outlets. There was no proscenium as such, the aperture being simply embellished by fabric ‘legs’ and a festoon border across the top. The foyers had art deco light fittings (supplied by F. H. Pride) and elegant etched mirrors. Panels for the display of film production ‘stills’ outside the entrance survived in situ until closure. Fortunately these now rare items were acquired by the Museum of London when the cinema was demolished. There was provision for an organ but one was never installed. In interview the architect spoke of how a blacksmith adjacent to the site claimed the right of ‘ancient lights’, which consisted of a minute cob-webbed window high up in the side wall of his forge; however, the cinema wall went up over one weekend before the blacksmith could obtain a court injunction to prevent construction.

The authorities at Esher appear to have been more conservative as the street façade here had to be traditional in character for it to gain approval. To save time, Nye discussed the frontage with them before starting on the design. A configuration similar to Chesham, of flats and shops flanking the cinema entrance, was treated in neo-Georgian style, with tall round-headed windows to light the café on the first floor. The internal scheme (particularly in the auditorium) followed that of Chesham but with an illumination diffuser in the ceiling akin to coffering and painted decoration on the balcony side walls representing tropical vegetation. The most distinctive feature of the Esher cinema was the reverse or double floor rake at stalls level. From the rear wall the floor sloped in the usual way to a point half-way down the auditorium, then rose at a slightly steeper angle towards the proscenium with the effect that the audience at the front would be inclining their heads backwards more

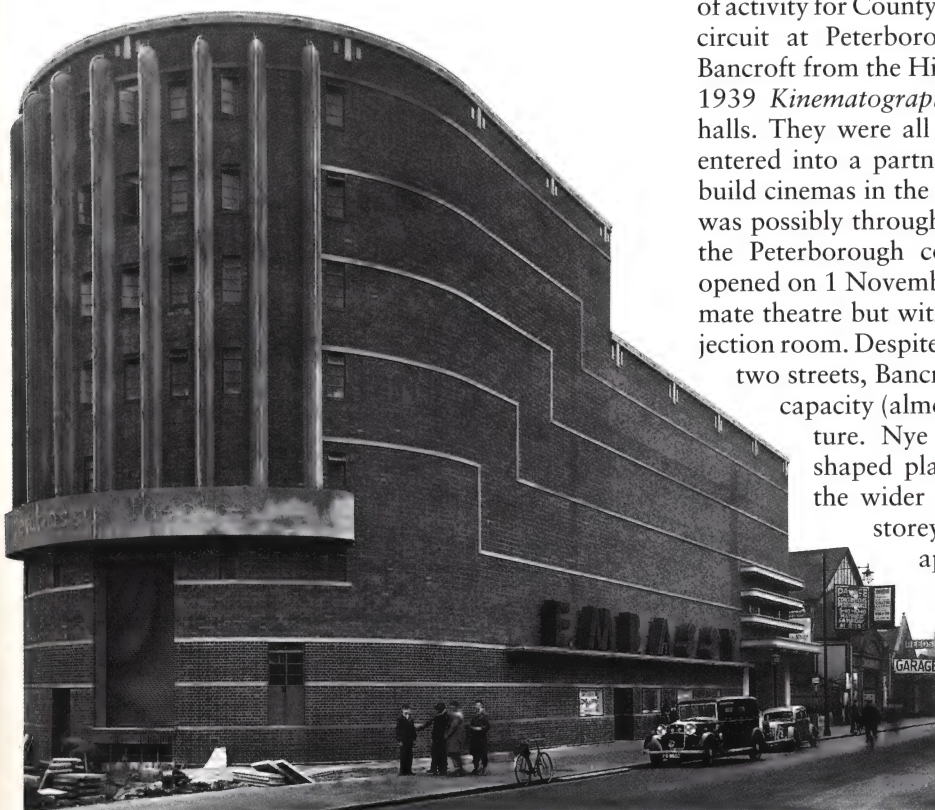
than normal. This represented an interesting variation on conventional sight-lines and can be seen elsewhere (although not often) but in this instance, because of the rising ground level from front to rear, it had the advantage of saving an expensive excavation for the foundations. This unusual arrangement may have inadvertently helped to preserve the auditorium in its original condition – the café had to be converted to provide a second ‘screen’. The Embassy is now a justifiably listed building. An *Ideal Kinema* article mentions the possibility of an organ being installed but this never appeared.

While working on the cinema in Esher, Nye was also engaged on the Granada at North Cheam for Sidney Bernstein. Nye had been called in by Bernstein following the suicide of the original architect, James Morrison, after the side wall of the cinema had been built in the wrong position and condemned by the local fire department. Nye did some replanning and, as the project was late due to Morrison’s death, work proceeded at great speed to meet the deadline for the opening on 22 September 1937. It was Nye’s only major work for Bernstein; he described him as a ‘frightful driver’ (to completion) – one can only speculate if this characteristic may have had a part in the demise of poor Morrison. The façade at North Cheam was Morrison’s authorship, with a resemblance to his Granada at Bedford. Nye remarked that while Bernstein could intelligently discuss plans when looking at them the wrong way up, he “didn’t have much idea about design, quite frankly”, a somewhat surprising statement considering Bernstein’s patronage of the greatest cinema decorator of the day, Theodore Komisarjevsky. For the interiors at North Cheam, the Russian designer produced rough drawings which Nye’s draughtsmen would then work up for use by the fibrous plaster contractor when making the decorative mouldings. The Granada was Nye’s largest cinema commission with some two thousand seats. It had an eight rank Wurlitzer organ, opened by Lloyd Thomas. This cinema, in the outer suburbs of south-west London and situated away from any public transport apart from buses, was built in anticipation of an underground railway extension which never materialised. Possibly because of this out-of-the-way location, the Granada did not survive beyond 1969.

In terms of designing new auditoria, David Nye was at his busiest during 1937. He completed five cinemas during that year – two for Shipman and King and one for Granada already mentioned and then, in the autumn and winter, two for County Cinemas and a new live theatre in Peterborough for the H. Bancroft circuit of Wisbech, Cambridgeshire. Nye’s first cinema for County was the Rex at Farnborough in Hampshire, opening only three days after the Granada North Cheam on 25 September 1937. The County circuit had been established in 1927 by a Swiss entrepreneur named Charles John Donada. County started by acquiring independent cinemas but, from 1932, they commenced building on their own account with Robert Cromie as their architect. He designed for them some impressive properties such as the Regals at Wimbledon and Hull (for a comprehensive account of the County circuit see the article by Allen Eyles in *Picture House* No. 9, Winter 1986). When Nye took over, the cinema at Farnborough was built to comple-



(Above) Facade Rex Farnborough and auditorium County Fleet. (Below) Embassy Peterbrough.



ment the Scala which County already owned, and is an example of their 'blanket' policy, like that of Shipman and King, whereby a sister would be built for an existing property in a particular location with the intention of squeezing out any possible competition. The Rex had a serviceable brick front with a horizontal window in the centre of the first floor, and windows in the wings extended down to accommodate the publicity frames for forthcoming films. Further interest was provided by fluting on the parapet and metal scrollwork on the entrance doors (this decoration was removed in later years). The spacious auditorium, built to seat over 1,200, had simple fibrous plaster moulding and stencilled patterns decorating the walls. The plans indicate organ chambers but no pipes ever occupied them.

The next County project, at nearby Fleet, was a complete reconstruction of an earlier acquisition and opened on 20 November 1937. A more utilitarian concept, it had a cement rendered frontage with minimal architectural detailing and a simple auditorium decoration scheme of fibrous plaster covings for concealed lighting. A third County cinema, at Marlow in Buckinghamshire, did not open until 14 January 1938. Here the existing County cinema closed when this replacement opened. Nye's severe brick façade at Marlow had a mildly Georgian flavour in deference to the adjacent distinguished early 18th-century mansion. A cinema of relatively modest scale with just under 750 seats, it had a pleasant foyer and an auditorium again depending on moulded covings for effect. In October of the same year Nye completed another reconstruction for County, the Empire, a somewhat primitive cinema at Bordon army camp, Hampshire. Plans prepared for a final County project, the Rex at Egham, Surrey, never came to fruition. Nye stated that he found Donada an amicable client.

As previously mentioned, Nye made time in the midst of activity for County to design a theatre for the Bancroft circuit at Peterborough. This chain, run by Harry Bancroft from the Hippodrome Wisbech, is listed in the 1939 *Kinematograph Year Book* as operating eleven halls. They were all in East Anglia although Bancroft entered into a partnership with Shipman and King to build cinemas in the south – at Reigate and Crawley; it was possibly through this connection that Nye secured the Peterborough commission. The Embassy, which opened on 1 November 1937, was conceived as a legitimate theatre but with the judicious provision of a projection room. Despite the awkward site at the junction of two streets, Bancroft required the maximum seating capacity (almost 1,500) for the smallest expenditure. Nye came up with an ingenious 'v'-shaped plan with the auditorium occupying the wider part and the stage house and six storeys of dressing rooms fitted into the apex. A series of string – courses relieved the bare areas of brickwork on the exterior side walls, with a vertical emphasis introduced on the rounded stage end in the form of streamlined pilasters separating the dressing room windows. The scene dock entrance had an unavoidably



Embassy Peterborough auditorium and (below) Embassy Fareham

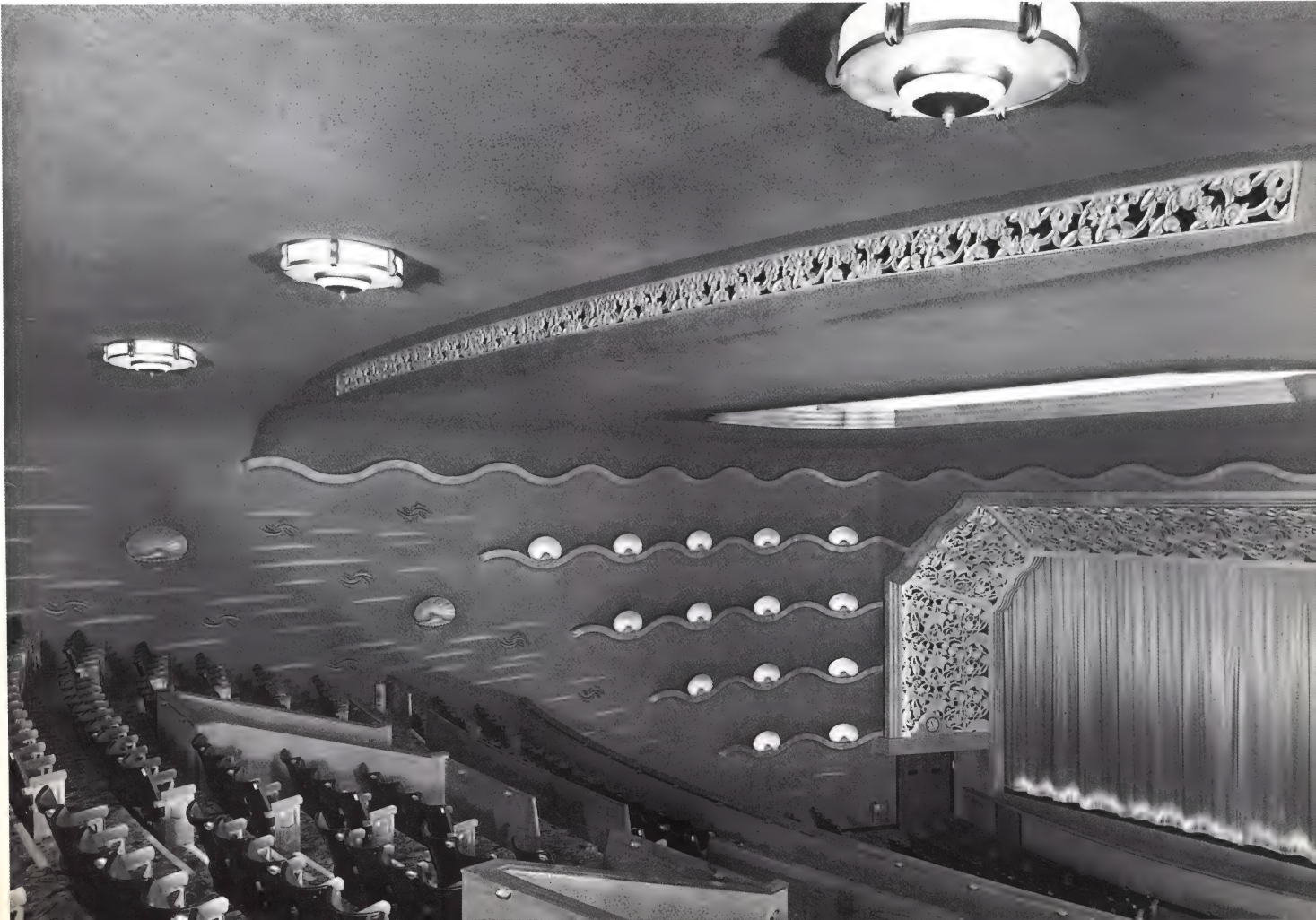
conspicuous position on the corner. Internally, the architect created one of his most satisfying auditoria with the balcony front brought in close proximity to the stage and a false proscenium of coved fibrous plaster mouldings, together providing a sense of intimacy required in a live theatre. The restricted site also dictated that the balcony should be steep. The Embassy operated as a live theatre until 1953 when films started to double with stage shows. It passed to ABC in 1965.

Nye's last two pre-World War Two cinemas for Shipman and King were at Fareham on the south coast and Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire. The Embassy, Fareham opened on 19 April 1938 and again it complemented an existing Shipman and King cinema in the town, the Savoy. It was more than twice the size of the old Alexander cinema which had stood on the site of the Embassy. The narrow brick façade was enlivened by three concrete fins supporting neon tubing flanked by circular 'portholes'. Art deco metalwork added interest to the entrance doors. The foyer had a fibrous plaster cove ceiling (by, as usual, Molloy and Egan) and the same patterns were repeated for the roof of the auditorium. More elaborate plaster decoration in an entwined leaf theme concealed the air ducting on either side of the stage with trompe l'oeil painting on the side walls.

The Rex Berkhamsted was Nye's last pre-war cinema for Shipman and King – a project for a sister to the Embassy Welwyn Garden City remained unrealised. The scheme at Berkhamsted was ambitious and on a large site. Built into a steep hillside, construction commenced with considerable excavations. At the rear of the site there was sufficient room for a large car park – an important facility for Shipman and King schemes in affluent areas where a growing proportion of the audience would have access to a car. The new cinema was paired with an earlier property at Berkhamsted, the Court. The Rex opened on 9 May 1938 with a Shirley Temple epic, *Heidi*. The street façade incorporated five lock-up shops beneath two storeys of flats with the cinema entrance on the left of the composition. The arched window above the entrance doors lit a foyer of equal height to the flats thereby creating a grand three-storey space. This was Nye's most imposing foyer with twin flights of stairs to the balcony to either side of the way through to the stalls and tea room. A huge chandelier cascaded from a triple-coved ceiling and the walls were painted with vertical lines to accentuate their height. Art deco mirrors and floor tiles laid in strips completed the effects of this memorable interior. Unusually, the café was on the ground floor at the rear of the stalls; due to the auditorium being at right-angles to the foyer, the tea room was more easily placed in this position than in the more common location of the



Rex Berkhamsted



void between the rear stalls and the balcony. To support the balcony above, the tea room had to be interrupted by columns but the 'capitals' were made to incorporate lighting sconces. The cornices were ornamented with Mollo and Egan plaster vegetation. There were windows in the left hand wall and the kitchen was beyond a partition at the far end. Advertised as being open daily from 10am to 10pm for both patrons and non-patrons of the cinema, this charming café provided morning coffees, 'popular luncheons', 'dainty afternoon teas' and, from 6pm, 'high teas' and suppers. More serious 'evening dinners' were 'by arrangement'. For those who had missed all these opportunities for sustenance, 'light teas' could also be served in the auditorium during the actual performance. The Rex had (and at the time of writing, still has) a unique auditorium with decoration of illuminated plaster shells mounted on wavy ribs and a broad valence of yet more Mollo and Egan vegetable matter surrounding the proscenium, highlighted from concealed emplacements. It seated an audience of some 1,100 with the atypical characteristic of having a greater audience capacity in the balcony than in the stalls (achieved by extending the balcony rakers beyond the rear wall to support the projection suite built outwards). This resulted in an ugly and conspicuous elevation on the left-hand side of the building. To reach this 'crows nest' projection room, the operator had an extremely unpleasant and tortuous route around the outside of the building on metal catwalks and stepladders.

In 1976 the Rex changed hands and extensive alterations ensued: two studio cinemas were created in the balcony and the stalls were turned over to bingo, with players entering through a side door in the café, which had by then long since closed. Most of the decoration survived these alterations, enabling the Rex to qualify for listing in the late Eighties but almost simultaneously the cinema part of the building closed down, shortly followed by the bingo operation. By then the Rex had been purchased by a London property company with the intention of redeveloping the site. The preservation order and the excellent local planning authority, Dacorum Borough Council, have prevented an unacceptable compromise plan whereby the auditorium would have become an atrium at the centre of an office complex. In recent years a 'friends' group for the Rex has been established in the town, who wish to see the cinema used as a performing arts complex – an eminently suitable and worthwhile purpose.

Apart from the Empire Bordon Camp, already mentioned, only one other cinema designed by David Nye opened before the onset of war – the Strand at Bideford in North Devon on 21 July 1938, for a local independent entrepreneur, Maurice Prince, trading as Bideford Entertainments Ltd. In the previous year Mr. Prince had also built the Regal at nearby Barnstaple, in a street named the Strand – which may account for the unusual name of the Bideford cinema. Nye's brick façade for the Strand somewhat resembled his frontage for the Rex Farnborough, except that it had an extra storey and three vertical windows as against one horizontal window. A frieze of stylized fish added interest to the foyer, with the auditorium decoration confined to three coves of fibrous plaster around the proscenium and a few floral swirls

further back. Mr. Prince sold out to the Stratford-on-Avon Cinema Co. in 1973 and the Strand closed in 1981 to become a nightclub, followed by demolition eleven years later.

Two further Nye cinemas, the Embassy Bridgend, in South Wales, and the State St. Budeaux, a suburb on the western outskirts of Plymouth, were almost complete when war broke out in September 1939. The former was built for Bridgend Cinemas Ltd., a company controlled by George Isaacs who also operated the other cinemas in the town, the County, the Palace and the Pavilion. The Embassy, standing by the River Ogmore and with a large forecourt, opened on 30 October 1939. The restrained brick façade included the first floor continuous windows under a concrete hood seen at the Rex Farnborough and the straight parapet with the horizontal mouldings from the Embassy Petts Wood. Internally, the proscenium followed that of the Rex Berkhamsted with a wide coving of typical Mollo and Egan fibrous plaster-work with chamfered angles to the arch. This feature and even the semi-festooned stage tableaux curtains were unchanged as recently as 1987, when the cinema ceased showing film. Thereafter it went over to bingo, becoming a nightclub four years later.

The State St. Budeaux opened on 16 November 1939. The opening happened with no formalities and little publicity – there was not even a reporter present – although a queue had formed to see Deanna Durbin in *That*

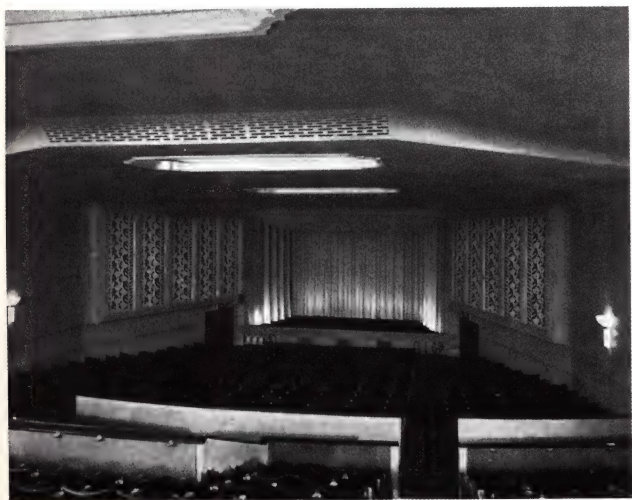


Strand Bideford

Certain Age. The cinema had been promoted by a local company with a share capital of £10,000. Again, Nye provided a street front in the usual brick with rounded corners and a large window over the entrance, here divided into five lights. Above, giant letters proclaimed the name of the cinema in neon tubing. Being in close proximity to the naval dockyard – a prime enemy target – the State suffered serious damage during the war and in 1947 Nye handled the necessary repairs. Following several changes of ownership, the State is now a snooker hall. Bridgend Cinemas were also responsible for the Strand at Llantwit Major, a small country town near the coast of Glamorganshire. Nye designed the cinema in conjunction with Edward Loveluck FRICS (1881–1955) of Bridgend and it opened on 20 April 1940.

Nye claimed that fifteen to twenty of his cinema schemes went unrealised due to wartime restrictions on building materials. These included the cinema at Egham for County already mentioned, one at Barry in South Wales for Bridgend Cinemas and a small chain for Abrahams, the theatre and cinema speculators, in the Channel Islands*. There were even plans for a cinema in Denmark which never came to fruition for similar reasons. Nye closed his practice for the duration and served in the Royal Navy on the hazardous task of bomb disposal until posted to less stressful duties in Australia in 1944–5. The records of Nye's pre-war career perished during the London Blitz.

The great days of cinema construction ended at the Second World War. Afterwards there was little new work for architects in this field but Nye kept busy after he set up practice again (at 7 Victoria Street, Westminster) repairing bomb-damaged cinemas and making good the neglect of the war years. However, he did have the job of designing a replacement for the Regent Rye in East Sussex for Shipman and King, which had been completely destroyed. Built on a different site from its predecessor, it opened on 11 March 1948 – the first cinema to be built in England after the war. The company had to apply for a license from the Ministry of Works that was necessary at the time for all 'non-essential' buildings. A balcony could not be contemplated due to the shortage of steel and the roof beams and ceiling joists had to be made of aluminium alloy, an unrestricted material.



Regent Rye

Other post war cinema work included the internal reconstruction of Poole's Hippodrome Gloucester in 1956 following a fire eight months previously; the Embassy, Nairobi, Kenya in 1957–8, a collaboration with Hamish H. Haswell Smith of Nairobi, for the Asian controlled Majestic Theatre Co. of Mombasa (further cinemas were planned in Mombasa itself and East London but work on the former had to stop due to Mau-Mau strife); and a considerable volume of activity for the substantial Jackson Withers circuit in South Wales and the West of England, details of which have recently come to light with the rediscovery of Nye's post-war files. The irascible Albert Jackson Withers, who appears to have run his ramshackle empire almost single-handed†, bombarded his long-suffering architect with appallingly typed and misspelt demands for leaking roofs to be patched, prosceniums to be widened for CinemaScope (which had just arrived) and new foyer confectionery kiosks. One of his cinemas, the Royal at Pontypool, was a building in such an advanced state of delapidation that for safety reasons demolition had been proposed; Nye drew up plans for a splendid replacement but they remained unrealised. Later, after Withers had retired, it is disconcerting to find a suggestion from Nye to his successor that the Royal would make a suitable site for a supermarket. Incredibly, the Gaiety Abertillery had been constructed above a stream and Nye had the job of instigating lengthy investigations to ensure against flooding. For his internal fibrous plasterwork at this time, contracts were being handled by David Esdaile & Co. of South London – including work for Withers. In the early Fifties this studio was still designing schemes in the art deco style. Esdaile's attentions could invoke the wrath of Withers, who in a letter of December 1951 complained to his architect that the recently redecorated interior of the Savoy Penzance was "ugly in its inception and

*One of the Abrahams family attended the opening of Nye's Sevenoaks cinema and found it difficult to believe that the entire building had only cost £10,000. Subsequently he worked for them on alterations to a cinema in Acton, West London.

†Keith Skone kindly supplied the following information concerning the Jackson Withers Circuit. The 1917 *Kinematograph Year Book* lists J. Withers as the proprietor of the Town Hall cinema, Bargoed, Glamorganshire. By 1927 he had two cinemas in Bargoed and three in Abertillery. In 1934, Albert Withers, with his co-director H. Victor Davis, controlled three cinemas in Bargoed, five in Abertillery and two more in nearby Blackwood. By the mid-1940s the circuit had taken over South Wales Cinemas, based at the Albert Hall Swansea. Ten years later they acquired seven suburban cinemas in Cardiff together with others in Pontypridd and in the coal mining valleys of South Wales. Earlier in the same decade the circuit had taken control of nine cinemas in Cornwall and a number in the Bristol area and in Wiltshire. At its greatest extent, the company operated some thirty-nine cinemas. Inevitably their holdings diminished during the Sixties – many cinemas were converted to bingo or were sold off to independents – and the circuit disappeared in the late 1970s with the sale of the remaining buildings to Rank for £2 million – some, such as the State St. Budeaux, becoming Top Rank bingo halls.

Albert Jackson Withers was running cinemas from c1917 until he retired around 1952–5, when the managing director of the circuit became a solicitor, Julian Hodge. The name Albert Withers also crops up in Nye's correspondence with the company and while his involvement is not clear, Keith Skone is of the opinion that he was concerned with cinemas from c1916–c1960.

colouring", requesting Nye should "take a little interest and see I have something having artictitcness" (*sic*) in the forthcoming work at the Carlton Westbury-on-Trym (Bristol).

Nye also worked for Granada during this decade, mainly on minor alterations and refreshment counters, but two particularly far-reaching schemes have emerged with the purpose of subdividing the auditorium of the Granada Tooting into a dance hall and a reduced scale cinema and converting the Walthamstow property for bowling, retail use and again a smaller area for films. Clearly, by 1959, regularly filling these huge buildings was becoming a problem. Earlier, in 1948, a new Granada was proposed for Watford (unrealised) and in 1955–8 Nye altered the Empress theatre at Brixton when the company decided to make it into a cinema.

As cinema commissions were becoming scarce, Nye turned to other types of work. His great love had been the preservation of historic buildings – he sat on the committee of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings for thirty-five years. Commissions came from church authorities, the National Trust and numerous country house owners. He was surveyor to the chapter of two cathedrals (Southwark and Guildford) and built sixteen parish churches – some were new and others reconstructions following war damage. Among the more unusual projects was 'The House that Moved' at Exeter in 1961, a three storey timber-framed 14th-century merchant's house which had to be rolled bodily several hundred yards as part of a city replanning scheme. Prestigious work came to the busy practice in 1959 with the design of a new livery hall for the Worshipful Company of Pewterers in the City of London. Nye was awarded an M.B.E. in December 1978 for his services to architecture and retired in August 1981. He died of a heart attack, the consequence of angina – a disease which he had kept secret – on 18 February 1986. He was a practising Christian and, up to the last year of the war, a total abstainer and vegetarian – the latter philosophy regarded as eccentric some fifty years ago. The architectural practice continues today in Cranleigh, Surrey, under the name Nye, Saunders and Partners.

The great attraction Nye had for film exhibitors in the Thirties was his ability to build cinemas at a reasonable price (£10 to £15 per seat, against a national average of £27 per seat*), in the minimum of time (six to eight months), a façade that would harmonise with the locality and have a pleasing 'modern' interior. Cinema moguls had a poor reputation with architects but in the interview Nye emphasised that he "never had a bad client in the cinema business". However, this has to be viewed in the light of the fact that he accepted fees lower than the RIBA approved scale of charges, maintaining that this should be permissible because his commissions were part of an on-going programme of work. Constantly on the lookout for constructional savings, Nye devised a way of avoiding the expensive steel frames in auditoria walls, replacing them with brick piers separated by convex sections of eleven inch cavity brickwork. For this to be accepted by planning authorities he enlisted the assistance of a civil engineer who calculated the structural

*The Rank Organisation published figures in 1956 stating that the cost of the building a cinema had risen to £120 per seat.

implications and gave the idea professional credence. Today we can appreciate Nye's considerable contribution to cinema design in the form of two examples, the Embassy Esher and the Rex Berkhamsted, which should continue to be part of our heritage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following for their kind assistance with the preparation of this article: Arthur Saunders (latterly, David Nye's partner); Margaret Horder (his personal secretary for many years, who preserved Nye's post-war files); David Nye's wife Frances and daughter Elizabeth Best; Keith Skone, for his assistance with the Jackson Withers Circuit; Allen Eyles, for confirming the architect of the Strand Llantwit Major; Brian Oakaby, the CTA archivist; Elwyn Gibbs, archivist of the Llantwit Major Historical Society, and the staff of the RIBA library in London and local history librarians and archivists at Barnstaple, Barry, Bridgend, Llantwit Major and Plymouth.

THE CINEMAS OF DAVID EVELYN NYE

1935

Cinema, 152 High Street, Sevenoaks, Kent

Opened: 4 November

Client: Sevenoaks Cinema Co.

Seats: 1,150

Sold to L. Morris circuit in 1937 and renamed Plaza. Sold again in the same year to Cohen and Raper; sold to Granada Theatres in 1947 and renamed Granada in November that year

Organ: 2 manual, 5 rank Compton; console with illuminated surround mounted on lift; removed to private house c1960

Cafe

Closed: October 1960 and demolished for a road scheme

1936

Embassy, High Street, Maldon, Essex

Opened: 19 March

Client: Shipman and King

Seats: 1,250

Taken over by the Star Group and renamed Studio One in 1967; became bingo hall

Organ: 3 manual, 5 rank Wurlitzer; console with illuminated surround mounted on lift; removed to private house in 1968

Cafe

Closed: August 1982; demolished in 1985 and replaced by retirement flats named Embassy Court

Embassy, Queensway, Petts Wood, Kent

Opened: 12 October

Client: Shipman and King

Seats: 1,210

Cafe

Closed: 14 April 1973, demolished and site redeveloped

1937

Embassy, Germain Street, Chesham, Buckinghamshire

Opened: 11 January

Client: Shipman and King

Seats: 1,146

Cafe

Closed: 24 April 1982, and demolished in June 1983

Embassy, High Street, Esher, Surrey

Opened: 23 August

Client: Shipman and King

Seats: 1,200

Cafe (now converted into secondary cinema seating 117)

Passed to EMI, then Cannon and from 1996, ABC (main auditorium has 918 seats)

Listed: Grade II

Granada, 562 London Road, North Cheam, Surrey

Opened: 22 September

Client: Bernstein Theatres Ltd.

Seats: approximately 2,000

Organ: 3 manual, 8 rank Wurlitzer; console mounted on lift and connected to grand piano; removed to private house in 1969 and now in Lymm, Cheshire

Closed: 18 October 1969, demolished and site redeveloped as Sainsbury's supermarket

Rex, London Road, Farnborough, Hampshire

Opened: 25 September

Client: County Cinemas (opened after Odeon had taken control of County)

Seats: 1,208

Operation passed to Odeon, subsequently Classic and became a bingo hall

Closed: 16 June 1973 and demolished

Embassy, Broadway, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire

Opened: 1 November

Client: H. Bancroft Circuit

Seats: 1,484

Live theatre only until 1953, then mixture of film and stage use; acquired by ABC in 1965 and renamed as such in the same year; tripled in 1981; taken over by Cannon

Closed: 25 November 1989 and converted for other purposes

County, Fleet, Hampshire

Opened: 20 November

Client: County Cinemas (opened after Odeon had taken control)

Seats: approximately 1,000

Cafe

Renamed Odeon c1945

Closed: 12 October 1957 and demolished

1938

County, Station Road, Marlow, Buckinghamshire

Opened: 14 January

Client: County Cinemas (opened after Odeon had taken control)

Seats: 748

Renamed Odeon February 1941; acquired by independent operator from March 1959 and renamed Regal

Closed: 24 March 1984, demolished and site redeveloped as offices

Embassy, Fareham, Hampshire

Opened: 19 April

Client: Shipman and King

Seats: 1,000

Closed: 27 August 1983, demolished and replaced by fast-food restaurant

Rex, High Street, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire

Opened: 9 May

Client: Shipman and King

Seats: 1,100

Cafe

Taken over by the Star Group in 1973 and renamed Studio 1; acquired by Zetters in 1976 and twin cinemas created in bal-

cony named Rex 1 and 2 with bingo in stalls

Closed: 28 February 1988 and disused

Listed: Grade II

Empire, Bordon Camp, Hampshire

Opened: 29 May

Client: County Cinemas (after take-over by Odeon) in association with W. J. May

Seats: 475

Closed: August 1973

Strand, Kingsley Road, Bideford, Devon

Opened: 21 July

Client: Bideford Entertainments Ltd.

Seats: 816

Sold to Stratford-on-Avon Cinema Co. in 1973, passing to Roy James in 1981 before closure

Closed: 2 May 1981 to become a nightclub; demolished in January 1992

1939

Embassy, Tondy Road, Bridgend, Glamorgan, South Wales

Opened: 30 October

Client: Bridgend Cinemas

Seats: 1,324

Closed: 9 May 1987; renamed Ritz as bingo hall

State, Victoria Street, St. Budeaux, Devon

Opened: 16 November

Client: St. Budeaux Cinema Co.

Seats: 1,001

Acquired by Gwent and West of England Circuit (part of the Jackson Withers circuits) in the late Forties; name changed to Mayflower in April 1970

Closed: early March 1973, re-opening as a bingo hall on 29 March 1973, passing to Top Rank; now the Victoria Snooker Centre

1940

Strand, Boverton Road, Llantwit Major, Vale of Glamorgan, South Wales

Opened: 20 April

Client: Bridgend Cinemas

Seats: 950

Front stalls area adapted for dancing in post-war years

Closed: 8 November 1969 and demolished in 1970

1948

Regent, Cinque Ports Street, Rye, East Sussex

Opened: 11 March

Client: Shipman and King

Seats: 744

Closed: 29 September 1973

1956

Hippodrome, Eastgate Street, Gloucester, Gloucestershire

Opened: 18 June (reconstruction following a fire on 23 October 1955)

Client: Poole's Theatres

Seats: 1,400

Sold to Rank in September 1956; renamed Gaumont from April 1959

Closed: 22 April 1961 and demolished in September 1964

1958

Embassy, Latema Road, Nairobi, Kenya

Opened: mid to late 1958 (to replace the old Green cinema)

Client: Majestic Theatre Co.

Seats: 752 allowed for in design

Cafe

Open: ?

APPENDIX A

David Nye's post-war files have brought to light a considerable corpus of work or projected work for the following exhibitors:

Bridgend Cinemas

Cinema, **Bridgend**, Glamorgan – foyer alterations and projection room exits, 1952

A. O. Ellis of Torquay

Electric, **Brixham**, Devon – repairs, 1949

Electric, **Tiverton**, Devon – repairs, 1949

Tudor, **Torquay**, Devon – repairs, 1949

Granada Theatres

Empress Theatre, **Brixton**, South London – alterations for use as cinema, 1955–8

Granada, **Clapham Junction**, South London – foyer refreshment kiosk, 1959 and project for conversion of former cafe, 1960

Granada, **East Ham**, East London – foyer refreshment kiosk and alterations to shop adjacent to cinema, 1958–9

Granada, **North Cheam**, Surrey – foyer refreshment kiosk, 1957

Granada, **Sevenoaks**, Kent – 'Expresso' bar and foyer refreshment kiosk, 1957–8

Granada, **Thornton Heath**, Surrey – foyer refreshment kiosk, 1959

Granada, **Tooting**, South London – auditorium subdivision for dancing/films, 1959

Granada, **Walthamstow**, East London – redevelopment of foyer for retail purposes and subdivision of auditorium for bowling/cinema, 1959

Granada site, **Watford**, Hertfordshire – proposed new cinema, 1948

Jackson Withers Circuits

Empress, **Abertillery**, Gwent – repairs c1950

Gaiety, **Abertillery**, Gwent – flood prevention and mining subsidence monitoring, 1949

Pavilion, **Abertillery**, Gwent – repairs, 1954

New Hall, **Bargoed**, Glamorgan – wide-screen alterations, 1953

Capitol, **Blackwood**, Gwent – wide screen alterations and repairs, 1953

Maxime, **Blackwood**, Gwent – wide screen alterations and repairs, 1952

Scala, **Zetland Road**, **Bristol** – repairs and alterations, 1952

Kings, **Camborne**, Cornwall – minor alterations, 1953

Astoria, **Chippenham**, Wiltshire – internal redecoration, 1952

Coliseum, **Cwm**, Gwent – minor alterations, 1952

Astoria, **Ebbw Vale**, Gwent – repairs 1952; wide-screen and redecoration, 1953

New Plaza, **Ebbw Vale**, Gwent – alterations for wide-screen, 1953

Palace, **Ebbw Vale**, Gwent – projection alterations and lavatories, 1952

White House, **Ebbw Vale**, Gwent – minor alterations, 1951

Palace, **Griffithstown**, Gwent – repairs and minor alterations, 1952

Windsor, **Neath**, Glamorgan – repairs and reconstruction, 1946–58

Regal, **Penzance**, Cornwall – minor alterations, 1949

Savoy, **Penzance**, Cornwall – minor alterations, 1949

Park, **Pontypool**, Gwent – wide-screen alterations, 1953; canopy, 1955

Pavilion, **Pontypool**, Gwent – wide screen 1953 and eradication of damp, 1955

Royal, **Pontypool**, Gwent – proposed reconstruction, 1950–3

County, **Pontypridd**, Glamorgan – repairs and alterations for wide-screen, 1949–53

Palladium, **Pontypridd**, Glamorgan – wide-screen and repairs, 1949–53

Park, **Pontypridd**, Glamorgan – wide-screen and repairs, 1949–53

Regal, **Redruth**, Cornwall – alterations to proscenium, 1953

Savoy, **Shirehampton**, Bristol – repairs, 1948 and refreshment kiosk, 1957

Albert Hall, **Swansea**, Glamorgan – repairs and redecoration, 1946–58

Carlton, **Swansea**, Glamorgan – repairs, 1952–8

Olympia, **Tredegar**, Glamorgan – proposed repairs and alterations, 1950

Plaza, **Truro**, Cornwall – alterations for wide-screen, 1954

Carlton, **Westbury-on-Trym**, Bristol – repairs and internal redecoration, 1948–52

Regal (Barnstaple) Ltd – (Maurice Prince)

Regal, **Barnstaple**, Devon – repairs to exterior faience cladding, 1954

Shipman and King

Rex, **Berkhamsted**, Hertfordshire – rendering repairs, 1947–58

Pavilion, **Dorking**, Surrey – alterations to projection box, 1949–50

Torquay Entertainments Ltd.

Electric, **Torquay**, Devon – new heating system and boiler house, 1951

APPENDIX B

In a letter from Margaret Horder, David Nye's long-serving personal secretary, to a previous researcher, she appends a hand-written list of the architect's cinemas. The following are those included by Miss Horder which have not been covered in either my main article or Appendix A:

Byfleet – no cinema ever existed here

Ealing – the Lido, West Ealing appears specifically on the list – could this be a duplication of place name (see entry below)?

'**Holbeach 1938**', Lincolnshire – the only cinema listed in the *Kinematograph Year Books* is the Hippodrome, part of the H. Bancroft Circuit. It seems possible that Nye worked here after the Embassy Peterborough for the same concern.

'**Torquay 1940**' – this could either be work at the Electric for Torquay Entertainments Ltd, or at the Tudor for A. O. Ellis. Nye worked for both exhibitors in the immediate post-war era.

'**Shaftesbury Av. 1940**' – in interview Nye recounted working for the Abrahams company at the Palace Cambridge Circus. However, Charles Cochran owned the Palace in 1924 with control passing to London Palace (1921) Ltd. – in which he had a holding – from the following year and for at least another twenty-five years.

Farnham – this might allude to work by Nye at either the Regal or Palace cinemas here, both of which were controlled by County through a subsidiary company. Both were originally designed by Harold Scott and opened in 1933 and 1936 respectively.

'**Lido W. Ealing 1938**' – no further information.

The author has attempted to provide as full a list of Nye's cinema works as possible but he would be pleased to know of omissions or receive further information.



Jimmy Nairn

A Life in Pictures

Interview by JANET McBAIN

James S. (Jimmy) Nairn was born in Glasgow in 1900 and died in Inverness in 1982. He recalled his life in the picture business in an interview conducted on Tuesday 19 September 1978 at his home in Inverness.

It was a remarkable career, extending from Magic Lantern shows to projecting early sound-on-disc films, to managing cinemas in Edinburgh, Stirling and Inverness, ultimately becoming supervisor of the northern half of the then extensive Caledonian Associated Cinemas circuit. Nairn was also, in his spare time, a photographer, film producer, inventor, cartoonist and A.T.C. commandant. In 1924, he took out patents for cinematograph apparatus in Britain, Germany, France and the U.S.A. He was one of the founders of the Edinburgh Film Society. He was the first amateur in Scotland to make a sound film in 1931, a short about Edinburgh for which the Lord Provost spoke a commentary. As a cartoonist, he transformed the café of the Playhouse Inverness into a children's wonderland each Christmas.

This interview has never previously been published.

SLIDE SHOWS

MY EARLY DAYS in connection with the cinema industry were on the Magic Lantern showing slides for lecture purposes at the Band of Hope. At that time I'd be aged about twelve years old and I rather liked the job – it was unpaid, of course. It was good fun to think that you're important enough to be showing the slides for the lecture on at the Band of Hope.

The slides mostly were hired, in the Glasgow area from Lizars, Buchanan Street. On a Monday morning a boy like myself would call and collect the slides for the week, with a running commentary printed. I would deliver



these to the lecturer. He'd have a rehearsal of the slides and read over his narration and everything was nicely timed. Then, when the audience came into the cinema, the narrator would read out his commentary from the printed form and I would change the slides according to the kick on the floor or rapping the table or clicking a little clicker. The stories dealt with our little Nell way down east, the drunken father, the immigrant – stories which always sent you out with tears. They were never very cheery ones.

It did relieve the tension now and again to show a slide on the screen of a beautiful lady with wings on her back, and the words of a song would be at the side and somebody would sing from the slide. That type of thing would ease the tension a bit. (A later version of that in the cinema industry was the 'bouncing ball'.) The telling of a story then was very effective, mind you, and very dramatic, and a tremendous amount of subjects could be hired. On the Saturday you brought your slides back and you picked up your programme for the Monday just as we do today with films. It had just come from the old Magic Lantern slide.

The telling of the story in those days was, of course, with stationary pictures. People got over that a bit by inventing animative slides. Now these were slides with two, three or four glasses which you placed in a Magic Lantern, and by moving a lever or turning a handle you got a crude form of animation – such as somebody bending down at a beehive. You pull the slide quick, you see a bee stinging him on the bottom, or a child on a swing, or a ship at sea rolling, or a seesaw. There were hundreds and hundreds of animated subjects like that – even into astronomy, giving the movements of the Sun, the Earth round the Sun, and the Moon round the Earth and Mercury, Venus, Saturn, and all the others. By turning this handle you got the whole movement of the universe from this animated Magic Lantern slide. It was really wonderful. Well, that didn't satisfy people at that time. They had to get something that moved, really moved.

Edison led the way with his peep show machines, when you turned the handle and you got a bit of music and you could peek down different machines by dropping a penny in. They were very popular all over America and in Britain. You had them in the arcades all over the country just as you have fruit machines in bingo halls. So that paved the way also for animation and the motion picture industry.

SOUND EFFECTS

With the invention of the cinematograph, pictures were silent of course, but they started having sound effects. Now the sound effects, which I took part in myself, were done on the stage. You had thunder and lightning on the silent film so we were at the back of the screen rattling a big sheet of metal. If it was a waterfall you ran peas down a shute, into a basin at the bottom, and it sounded like water falling. If it was horses' hooves, you had a slate and the coconut shells where you followed the cowboys, galloping and running and stopping. You had whistles to blow and horns and trumpets. You had wind effects

which were brought about with a piece of canvas over a drum and you revolved the drum and that gave the swish of the wind. You really felt you were doing something, creating something. Mind you, the effects weren't the same every night. You were either late or early and sometimes you missed your cue, because a picture watched from behind a screen is very difficult to follow – it's well out of focus. The screens in those days were made of linen.

I was in the Borough Halls, Pollockshaws. There was one projector, hand-cranked. The show was held on Saturdays and Mondays. You had to collect your film programme, run the film and take it back on the Monday morning or Tuesday morning after use. Now the hand-cranking was a laborious job. At the end of part one you put up the hall lights, changed onto part two, dimmed the hall lights, onto part two, and you followed this sequence with all these breaks between reels. Later, of course, followed twin machines. From the Borough Hall experience of sound effects behind the screen and so on, I joined a cinema down in Govan called the Govan Cinema. There I was made chief operator. There were two projectors, driven by motors. Now if somebody had given me a Rolls Royce I couldn't have felt any better – to have two machines, no hand-crank, was a wonderful experience.

Then, suddenly in 1924, I was asked if I would like to become manager of a cinema in Edinburgh. Oh, I thought this would be good, although I'd no experience of management.

THE SAVOY EDINBURGH AND THE TALKIES

The people concerned said, "It's a lovely cinema. Its name is the Savoy." Well, immediately my vision went to the Savoy, Glasgow – a big super, colossal cinema, and I wondered how on earth, with no experience – I was very young at the time – I'd manage.

However, I met the managing director and went through to Edinburgh. He took me down to Stockbridge, showed me the Savoy, and my heart sunk. It wasn't a big super-colossal, it was an old shooting range converted into a cinema called the Savoy, seating 906.

Now in the days of orchestras you had extra work to do. When you had a vacancy in the orchestra, you had to sit in the auditorium and listen to all the applicants for the vacancy. Well, not knowing one good violin tune from another, or one good violinist from another, you just had to make up your mind somehow or other that he was a good violinist or you liked the look of the fellow or something or other, and thereby engage an extra member for your orchestra. You had to go to a place in Edinburgh and hire the score for the particular film they were showing the following week. You paid five shillings for the musical score and then you took that back again and had another score for the next picture. Over and above that, you had travelling singers so that when you had a film – say, Rudolph Valentino in *The Son of the Sheik* – the singer came along and sang a prologue, all dressed up like a sheik and singing "The Sheik of Araby" and "Song of the Sheik" and all the other songs that were popular at

the time. Your cinema was packed to the door, of course, and the vocalist singing his heart out. He was usually supplied free by Francis, Day and Hunter, Northern Music Publishers, whose whole purpose was to stimulate the sale of sheet music. But all these carried a lot of worries and problems in presentation. Your orchestras gave you a lot of worry because they were always going out on strike and they were a bit of a headache.



With the advent of the talkies all this would be done away with. You would have no worry now with your sound coming on a disc and your film coming on its reels, right? That sounded good. Well, the opening day did come along at the Savoy. The Al Jolson film arrived but the discs didn't. However, we finally located the discs – they had been mislaid by the railway somewhere – and managed to get the show going by 6 o'clock.

Now the disc was ideal as long as somebody didn't bump into the turntable. If somebody bumped into the turntable, your needle jumped and you couldn't get back into synchronisation. So what we usually did was change over to the next reel. The result was that the audience might miss 500 or 600 feet of the story. It was the only way to do it because it wasn't possible to jump the needle from track to track getting it synchronised spot on. If you tried, the result was as you watched the screen and moved the needle a door would open and a dog would bark. You'd move the needle again and a woman would talk as a man's voice. You watched again and you'd try to match the train coming into the station and the sound effects would come on as the train left the station, not as it entered the station. So then you just gave it up and onto the next reel.

That was a problem of the disc. Mind you, the sound was very good and with Warner Bros. you were supplied with a cue sheet. Now in those days, in the recording on the disc the sound was never at a constant level. You had to act as your own conductor with the cue sheet supplied by the renter. You watched your cue sheet and you projected the picture, the cue sheet saying when so and so closes the door, up two; and when so and so enters the car, it has to go down one. All these actions on the screen gave the cue to move the volume up or down accordingly, to get a constant level of sound.

FROM SAVOY TO RITZ



With the advent of sound on film it all became automatic so we had no further problems there. I was moved from the Savoy to the Ritz Edinburgh. I opened the Ritz as the first manager. I presume that was my promotion for my hard work at the Savoy. During the building of the Ritz I had a lot of good fun making a film of the total construction of that cinema, from start to finish. I was quite a good photographer at that time. Very few managers, if any, bothered much about motion picture photography. However, before going to the Ritz, I had been making films at the Savoy on a commercial basis. I was making films on local events. I approached some of the shops and asked them if they would subscribe something towards the film and in return I would have a shot of their shop in the street scenes. So by doing it that way the film cost nothing. At that time I was developing, printing, editing and titling all my own films and having them on within hours on the cinema screen. That was all good experience so that when the Ritz did open I had a beautiful film of the construction of the Ritz from start to finish which on the opening day and the opening week created a tremendous amount of interest from the public.



I was now in an all-day cinema, open continuously, and I felt like I was getting somewhere. Mind you, the wife wasn't very high. There was the wonderful run of all the early talkies in 1929. Running Al Jolson in *The Singing Fool* and all these other great pictures of that particular period was a great experience.

THE REGAL STIRLING

The time came when I was offered a move over to Stirling. Now the Ritz seated 1,900 people. The Regal Stirling seated 2,200 people, so that's what mattered – you're going to a bigger cinema still. It made a difference in your



salary at the time because the two went together, you see. My arrival in Stirling was around about 1934, and I thought I'm just getting on very well here now with the very latest equipment and a big posh cinema, just opened a year before I took it over, in a nice central town, with its castle and its history all round the castle – just as Edinburgh had in a bigger way.

So in Stirling I very quickly settled down and I had a wonderful layout plan, an operating box all beautifully tiled, a good type of audience, and good car parking facilities, so it made the Regal a good centre of attraction because of the activities that took place in and around it.

Film-making I continued in Stirling, making films like *The Lady of the Lake* around Stirling, films of Stirling Castle, industrial films of Falkirk, and various other subjects on 16mm and some on 35mm. This was all good publicity and good experience for yourself and good for your cinema.

All sorts of events, like prize-giving ceremonies, were held in the cinema. One of the big events was the Stirling Charity Week which I got mixed up in by having to create a character every year to present for the whole week. We created characters like Fillup Mecan, Ican Skinyou, Dontbe Stingy. I used the character as a central feature in my midnight show of presentations. These shows started at 11 o'clock at night and finished somewhere about three in the morning. There was a variety show entirely built up of local amateurs, with scenery painted by myself and settings made by myself on the stage, a piano accordion band on the stage all the time as actors took their place in front of them. The commentary for the whole show was done by myself. It was really a wonderful experience in stage production. This all served me in good stead when I later moved on to Inverness.



Stirling was a town I thoroughly enjoyed and all these activities certainly kept me busy from morning to night and the job was not a job at all, it had really become part of your life. It didn't concern you what your home life was, or any other life, the show seemed to come first – the show was you and you were the show, a wonderful experience. However, finally I got tempted to come to Inverness in 1941.

THE PLAYHOUSE INVERNESS

I thought, Inverness – that's kind of far out, way up in the Highlands. I didn't like that idea. The people at Inverness offered me a pound more a week which in 1941 was quite a lot of money. But I turned it down at £1 a week. However, they wrote again making it £2 a week. Well, I could hardly refuse that – because £1 in those days must be worth £8 or £9 today.

I called at Inverness a week beforehand to have a look at the place. I was a wee bit disappointed in the beginning. The Playhouse looked like an old-time theatre converted to a cinema. But it never was a theatre – it was just built like a theatre with all the side boxes. The architect must have been brought up in the variety theatre days. Having taken it over, I saw big possibilities. It had a good stage, a bigger stage than I'd been used to, and I felt I could do things here.



Coming to Inverness, I thought three years would be enough. Well, it's been thirty-six years ago when I came up here. I soon got settled down and I found the people of Inverness such wonderful people and the scenery round it ideal for motion picture work. That set me going right away, making all sorts of films in the Highlands, like *Homes for a Highland Town* (which was a sound film), *Holiday on Loch Ness*, *Trip Round Loch Ness*, *Highland Castles*. Another film, *Bee-Keeping in the North*, took two years to make because I followed the life of the bee from the birth of the queen right through the whole cycle of events until a swarm builds up and a hive is split in two. In the beginning I was well protected by nets and elastic bands round my sleeves and round my trouser legs. I did get stung two or three times but you got to the stage it didn't worry you really. It was a wonderful education. By the time I'd made the film, I felt I could lecture on bees at any university.

The King and Queen in Balmoral in 1941 was a wonderful experience. I was there for two or three days. It was a film with the Queen's own Cameron Highlanders on parade being inspected by the King and Queen. I was then free to move around the grounds and take all the fill-in shots. One day I was in the rose garden, a sunken garden surrounded by a stone balustrade. While I was lying on my stomach filming the rose tree in the middle, I heard laughter on the balustrade. Looking round, four or five feet higher was the King and Queen and the Princess having a good laugh at something. So I thought to myself,

Well, what do I do now? Do I stand up or carry on? So I thought I'd better stand up. But the King shouts, "No, no, carry on with your worm's eye view! We're enjoying it." So I went down and finished the shot and then I stood up and they moved away, waving.

THE PROBLEMS OF THREE PATRONS

One of my usherettes came to me one day and said "Look, Mr. Nairn, there's a woman there with six children in the front stalls. They've been there since two o'clock and it's



now eight o'clock." I said, "Right, you tell me the next time they come in". The following week, during the summer season, the same wife came in with six children, boys and girls, so I went down, had a look. I said, "Well, they should be out by five o'clock, starting at 2-2.30pm." So at five o'clock I went back down, sat in the row behind them. At 5.30 they were still there. Then one of the children rose and went out to the toilet. He came back, then another one went out to the toilet and then another one, until the six of them had done the toilet. They sat down on each side of her, three on the left, three on the right. Then she takes her big bag up, opens her flask and passes round wee paper cups with tea in it and wee sandwiches along it and they all have their tea. Everything goes back into the bag and they sit on for the next performance. So I tapped her on the shoulder. I said, "Now I've been watching you today and I don't think it's fair that you should occupy these seats from two o'clock right to 8, 9 or 10 o'clock at night." I said, "Over and above that, can't you have more respect for your children – a stuffy atmosphere like this, thick with smoke, can't be good for their health". She just sat looking up at me with her mouth open and she said, "Are you finished?" I said, "Yes, I think you should leave". "Oh no, I don't need to leave" she said. I said, "Think of your bairns, Mrs. Take them home for the love of goodness". "Look Mister, they're no my bairns. I'm just watching them for my neighbours. This is their night out and my neighbours are all other places". So this was a form of baby-watching!

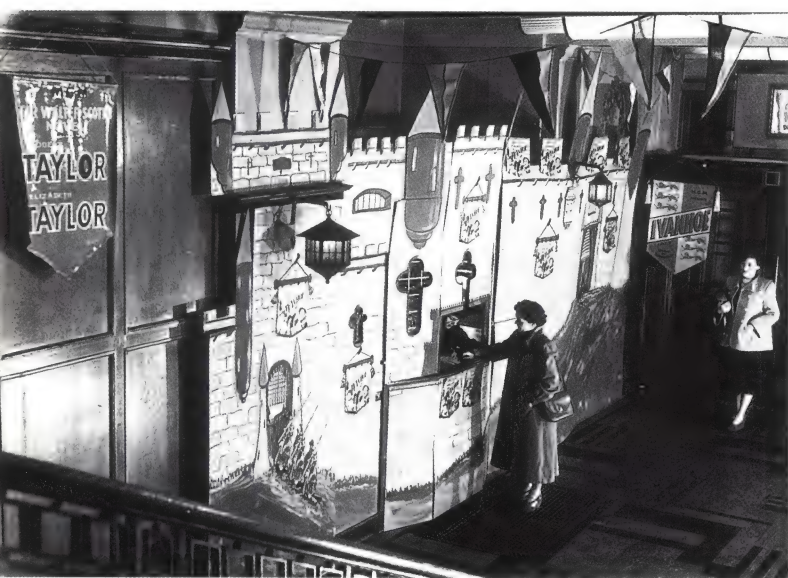
Another time, we laid nice new runner carpets and a girl came up and said, "Mr. Nairn, there's a man spitting on our carpet – he's smoking a pipe." "Oh," I said, "We'll soon fix him". So I went down and stood in the passage behind him for a while. Right enough he was smoking a

pipe, and he turned round and spat onto the carpet. So I leaned and tapped him on the shoulder and said "Look, mister, gentlemen are not supposed to spit on carpets. Don't you know that?". "Well," he says, "Why don't you put a slide on the screen saying that gentleman have not to spit on carpets". Well, that would have looked silly, wouldn't it, with "Gentlemen, please refrain from spitting"?

Another time, I saw a man on the balcony crawling up and down the rows on his hands and knees. I knew he was looking for something. So I walked past – this was a fire check – and then on my way back on the balcony I said to him, "Have you lost something?" By this time he was about five rows further down. He said, "Yes, I've lost my false teeth. They're a bit slack and the film was so funny I took them out in case I swallowed them. Now I can't find them." So I said, "Where were you sitting". So he told me. I said, "Right, so you put them on your lap?" "Yes." So I said, "Well, let's tip down the seat", and right enough they were down where the hinges is. That's where things usually slip – they fall below and stick on the hinges.

A ROYAL EVENT

Ivanhoe [1952] had a premiere in the Highlands because it was a Scottish film. And I thought we'll have to go out big here – so we turned the whole vestibule into the courtyard of a castle. The cash desk was the drawbridge with battlements all round and cannons and all sorts of thing.



You walked in and you might as well have been walking into Edinburgh Castle or Stirling Castle or somewhere. This was all painted by myself, you see, and the photographs were sent to the renter of the film, MGM. They thought it was so good that they put it into the showmanship competition for the whole of Great Britain. Now in addition to that, before I knew the result of the competition, I got wind that the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester were up at their shooting lodge outside

Inverness and I thought I'll phone and ask them to come down with the two Princes to see the film. But before I got round to phoning them, the Duke's secretary phoned me and said, "The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester would like to come and see *Ivanhoe*. Now we don't want any publicity. They just want to come as ordinary people, sit down and enjoy the picture, and go away." I said, "Right, I'll not invite the press. I'll not tell anybody about it".

So they duly arrived and the Duke would insist on opening his sporran and paying for the admission. I took them up to the balcony, put them in the front row of seats which I had reserved for them. Of course, as the patrons came into the balcony they saw them, you see. The two Princes, William and Richard, were looking over the balcony watching what was happening below and they sat and watched the picture until the interval. The Princes got up and bought their ice-cream cones from the girl with the tray and sat down licking them. When the show finished, it was all around that they were in. Of course, as they were coming out there was a crowd waiting to see them going into the car outside. And that's where the press came in and got some photographs. Somebody had tipped them off. It certainly wasn't me. But they didn't mind.

I thought a very nice thing happened as the Duke and the Duchess came out. He moved ahead and thanked me very much. The Princes came in between and they walked right past me. The Duchess came along, spoke to me for a few minutes, looked round and said, "Richard, William! Come back and thank Mr Nairn!", and they did. I thought that was so nice of the Duchess making her sons come back and do that.

NORTHERN SUPERVISOR

When I joined the company there was only one controller at that time based at Paisley. It was decided to split the territory up into a northern area and a southern area, so I was appointed to the northern area, which covered Fort William, Wick, Thurso, Tain, Invergordon, Inverness (four cinemas), Elgin (two), Nairn, Fraserburgh (two), Birkihamp, and then Keith.

I had to visit them at regular periods and make sure everything was going well, acting as a father to all the managers in shouldering all their problems which they very willingly passed on to you. So I was a controller right up until age caught up with me and the firm thought it was time I was taking it a bit easier. I fought against that because I'd never given retirement a thought. I didn't think at the age of 75 I was old enough to retire. And they said, "Well, look, we'll make you a consultant and you keep your own office and you can come in and out as you like." And that's what the position is. I didn't like it for about a year, but I've got used to it now after three years. I go in every morning at ten, and see what help I can be here and there, go down to La Scala or visit a cinema somewhere in my own time, not to take stock but just as a friendly visit.

Janet McBain is Curator of the Scottish Film Archive.

Letters to the Editor

END OF R. T. REA

Too late for inclusion in the last *Picture House*, I discovered that Reginald Thomas Rea moved to Ryde on his final retirement and died on 10 November 1976 at the age of 92. He was born on 18 September 1884 and according to his obituary in the *Isle of Wight County Press* he was a native of Gloucester.

CLIFFORD SHAW
Sheffield, Yorkshire

BANNED

"I've always hoped," said Sir Sydney Samuelson in the last *Picture House*, "That somebody interviewing me might say 'Where were you at school?' and I would say, 'Lancing', and they'd say 'Oh, Lancing College?', and I'd say, 'No, Lancing Council Senior Mixed'...."

Sir Sydney might like to know how the Luxor was viewed from Lancing College, at least when I attended that august establishment. Our headmaster was in no doubt: all cinemas were dens of iniquity and vice. Strangely, though, the coffee bar then next door to the Luxor was deemed to be quite respectable.

So if we should tire of the steaming fruits of the brand-new Gaggia espresso coffee machine and should chance to stray into the Luxor, a well-rehearsed routine would snap into action. The paybox staff would know if any teacher from the College had already been admitted. If so, the projection box would be phoned. Come the ice-cream interval, the house lights would not be brought up: honour was satisfied, for a pupil who has not been seen doing wrong cannot be punished.

Now I wonder if you can programme that little service into the computer down at the UCI...

GILES WOODFORDE
Oxford

CENSORED

The feature on De Frene's front of house displays [*PH21*, based on photographs supplied by the writer of this letter] brought back memories of happy days when we had freedom with layout and design before contractual obligations came in.

Looking at the photograph of the canopy display for *Anna and the King of Siam* at the Tivoli, I was reminded of a problem we had with the second panel from the left, showing a girl chained and being whipped. The photograph must have been taken on the day of fixing or just after, because we had a complaint from the London County Council and we had to change it – I forget what we replaced it with. Was the scene in the film?

RAY NORTON
Walton-on-Thames, Surrey

EDINBURGH EMPIRE

I would like to add a note of clarification to Adrienne Scullion's fascinating article on the early days of cinema in Scotland (*Picture House* No.21). The Edinburgh Empire was completely rebuilt in 1927 by W. and T. R. Milburn, the Sunderland theatre architects favoured by Moss throughout the Twenties and Thirties. It is theirs rather than Matcham's auditorium which has been restored and surrounded by a new glass walled foyer by Law Dunbar Naismith to create the Festival Theatre. If anything remains of Matcham's building it is only fragmentary and confined to the structural shell.

DAVID TREVOR-JONES
Tooting, South London

COOPER'S FIRST? THE BEESTON PALACE

As a new member of the Cinema Theatre Association I sent for all the back numbers of *Picture House* and have just read your article about Reginald Cooper in issue 8. The Palace cinema which is briefly mentioned in this article was bought by my grandfather, Joseph Allsop, in 1923. The picture house was originally built in 1912/13, the second one to open in Beeston, Nottingham.

In 1935 a decision was made to modernise the old fashioned Edwardian variety/picture theatre to face the increasing competition from the three new cinemas that were being planned for the catchment area of the Palace. Reginald Cooper was the architect chosen to carry out these alterations. I think the Palace conversion was probably the first cinema commission of Reginald Cooper as an independent architect. As the article showed, he went on to design some of the best suburban cinemas in Nottingham.

The paybox of the old theatre was open to the elements, which was typical of the period. Each side of the paybox were the entrance doors to the stalls. For security a metal grille could be drawn across the front of this opening when the show was closed. The projection booth was very cramped, squashed between two staircases rising from the entrance lobby to the circle, one in each front corner of the theatre.

Reginald Cooper's solution for the old fabric was drastic. He completely demolished the front of the building, removed half the roof and stripped out almost all the internal walls and steel girder work. All that was left were the side and back walls plus half the roof. A new front of house was then constructed with the new paybox set back in a vestibule with glass doors to the street. This cut out all traffic noise and in wet weather made for a cleaner cinema. A new self supporting balcony was constructed by means of cantilevering the

balcony supports from the new girder work of the front of the cinema and the back wall of the new auditorium. It was also secured at the sides to the original side wall steel girders. With no columns supporting the balcony as in the old theatre the sight lines were greatly improved. The back wall of the balcony was immediately above the rear wall of the stalls so the space above the entrance foyer was used for ladies' and gents' toilets plus workshop. Access to these was down a flight of stairs from the rear of the balcony. By increasing the height of the building Cooper was able to construct a new projection suite the full width of the auditorium. This consisted of the main projection room and side rooms for the rewinder and film storage, batteries and charging equipment, rectifier and switchgear.

With the exterior finished, Cooper then remodelled the interior. All traces of the original hall were removed. Using fibrous plaster, decorative mouldings and cornices he created a lighter, cleaner and more comfortable atmosphere to enjoy a night at the pictures. The cinema was completely rewired with new stage lighting and curtain control operated from the box. Exterior neon lighting was all to Cooper's design. The firm of A. A. Lazzarini was employed by Cooper to carry out his interior design. This was the first of many such commissions carried out in the next few years.

The front of the Palace was completely transformed by Cooper. The old Edwardian frontage with its plaster shields, urns and very large advertising billboard that dwarfed the façade was replaced by a clean smooth-plastered frontage painted a light cream. There was a canopy over the main doors surmounted by a stainless steel tower with the name Palace picked out with neon lights. This tower also formed part of the internal ventilation system. The conversion took about three months to complete. Considering the amount of demolition required, that was not very long.

Mr. Tate states in the original article that he wished Cooper had standardised on some of the detail work. This may be true of his later work but the Palace Beeston, Palace Long Eaton and the Savoy Derby Road all had common features such as the same design of floor covering for the foyer, stairways and lounges, the same style of entrance doors for the

front of house and the auditorium. The wooden capping and safety rail on the front of the balcony were also the same. Strip lights on the side walls of the the auditorium were also a common feature, although these were replaced in the Palace Beeston after the war because of difficulties getting replacements. All the light fittings in the front of house were identical.

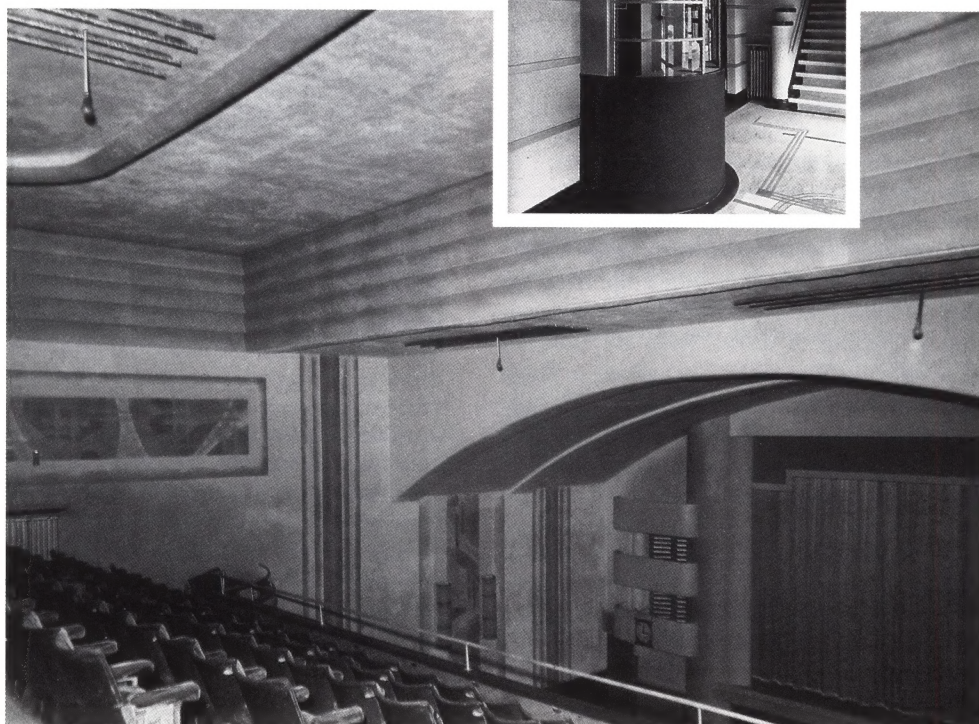
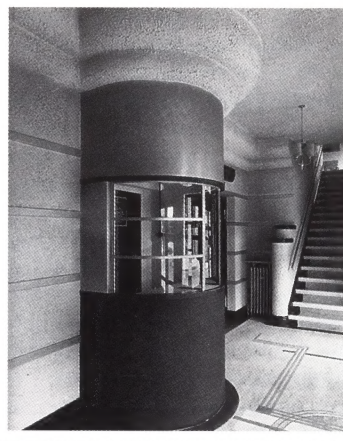
One advantage of this conversion as opposed to Cooper's complete designs was the ability in later years increase the proscenium opening to accommodate a wider CinemaScope screen. In his later designs Cooper invariably used the space at the side of the stage area for emergency exits. This put a limit on screen size on conversion to CinemaScope.

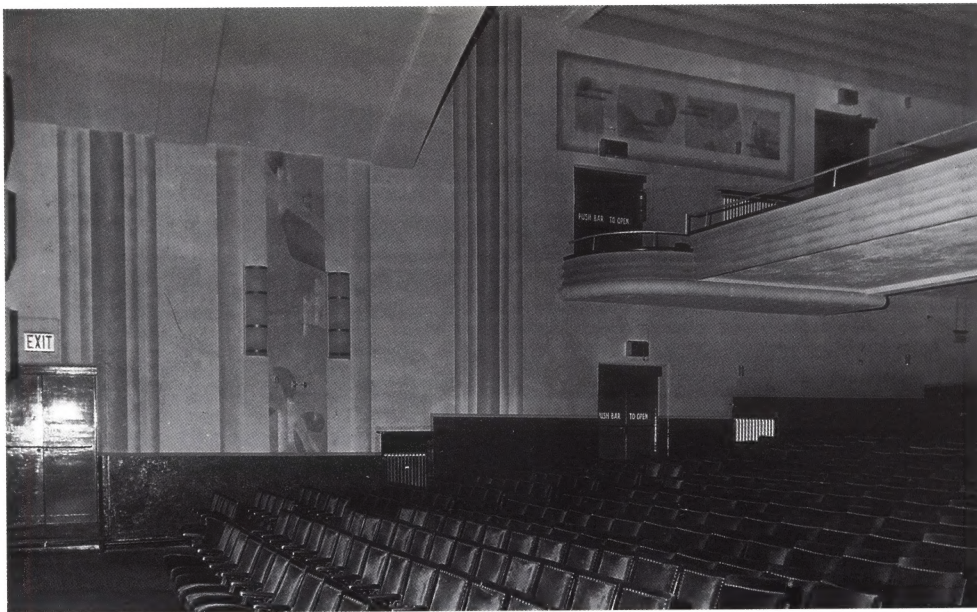
Your article in issue 8 of *Picture House* states a Mr. Pilkington had an interest in the Palace Beeston. This is not so. I understand that a Mr. Pilkington was a director of the Savoy Cinema and I assume he came to the Palace to inspect Cooper's work before awarding the contract for the Savoy to him. At this time a Mr. Richard Pell who worked for my grandfather left the Palace to become manager of the Savoy Derby Road.

The Palace continued to keep abreast of the best in cinema entertainment, updating its projection equipment, installing CinemaScope, and redecorating at regular intervals. However, in 1960 the Palace closed, another victim of falling attendance brought on by a move of the population from the centre of Beeston to new housing estates and to the competition of TV.

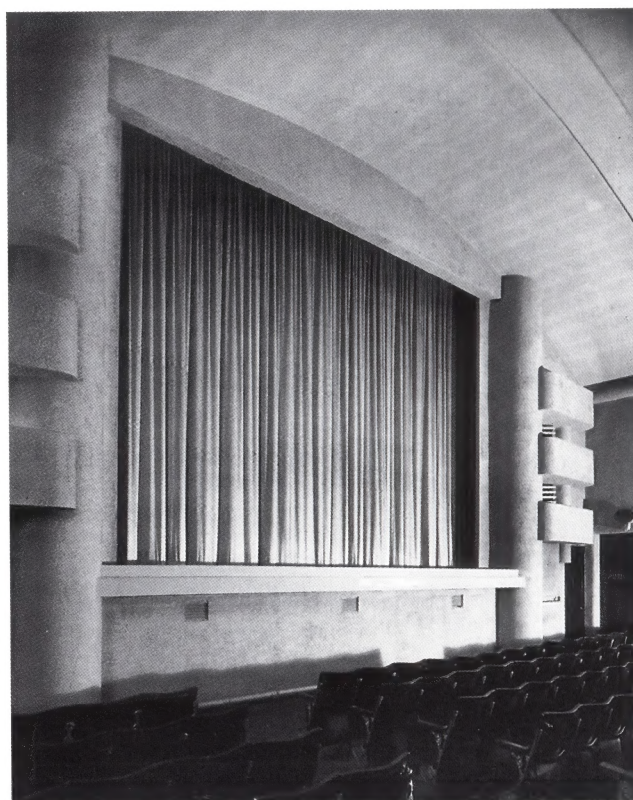
I have many happy memories of the hours spent, as a small boy and youth, in the box at the Palace. As a small boy my father would stand me on a beer crate so that I could reach the rewinder. A teacher once said to my mother, "If he spent less time at that cinema he would do better at school." Probably I would have, but it was more fun in the box!

LES ALLSOP
Beeston, Nottingham





No photographs of the Palace Beeston were available when the original article appeared. Those which we can now reproduce show that this conversion was effectively a brand-new cinema and one of some quality – besides being, as Mr. Allsop notes, probably Reginald Cooper's first solo assignment. We are most grateful to Les Allsop for the loan of these photographs. Anyone interested in a fuller account of the cinema, with further illustrations including the frontage of the old building, can acquire a well-produced booklet, *The Palace Cinema Beeston 1912–1960* by Les Allsop, by sending £2 [including postage] to him at 10 Fellows Road, Beeston, Nottingham, NG9 1AQ. Incidentally, this reference to the Cooper article provides a very belated opportunity to confirm that the plans and photographs on the opening spread of this article refer to the Savoy Derby Road, Nottingham. The caption stating this came adrift. – Editor.





Cinemas of David Nye

(Above and below left) Two views of the 1938 Embassy Fareham, Hampshire, taken in August 1983 when it closed.

(Below) the 1937 Embassy Chesham, Buckinghamshire, as it looked at its time of closure in April 1982.

(Photographs by Allen Eyles)

